

1990

Kunapipi 12 (3) 1990 Full Version

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Abstract

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KUNAPIPI



KUNAPIPI

VOLUME XII NUMBER 3
1990

Kunapipi is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet, and should be accompanied by a return envelope.

All correspondence - manuscripts, books for review, inquiries - should be sent to:

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Kunapipi

VOLUME XII NUMBER 3, 1990

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We wish to thank Allan Rich and Russell McDougall who both did so much to make this Newcastle issue possible.

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Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.

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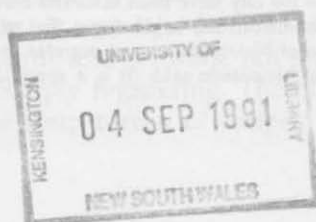
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Editorial

First I'll tell the readers in Newcastle about *Kunapipi*, and then I'll tell the readers of *Kunapipi* about Newcastle. *Kunapipi* was founded in 1979 with the special purpose of dealing with the literature, art and culture of the post-colonial world, of all those countries that were once painted red on the map of the world, an indication that they were 'owned' by Britain. From time to time we publish special issues where we feature certain countries, themes or writers. The last special issue was on the African novelist, Chinua Achebe. Others have been on West Indian literature, Aboriginal Culture Today, and Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing. This time I have decided to feature a city, the city of Newcastle, Australia. Why Newcastle, you ask? First of all, one could say, for selfish reasons. It was the town where I was born, grew up, and return to whenever possible, and though I have not lived there for over twenty-five years I still regard it as home. But there were other reasons for choosing Newcastle. It is a town which, I believe, fits perfectly into the colonial, post-colonial syndrome. It is approximately 150 kms from Sydney and is built, like Sydney, on the edge of the Pacific Ocean. The city lies at the mouth of the Hunter River and was founded as a penal settlement in 1797. The convicts were transported to Newcastle to mine the coal that was found there, and along with Norfolk Island it came to be one of the most brutal penal settlements in the colony. For some years coal was to remain its main industry with free immigrants coming essentially from the coal-mining towns of England and Wales. They were soon to learn that whatever help they needed they must provide themselves – what interested management was profit, not people. These early settlers started a pattern of self-help that has remained one of the characteristics of Newcastle, exemplified in such institutions as trade unions, Friendly Societies, Sick and Accident Benefits, and co-operative stores.

In 1912 the Government sold Crown land which, ironically enough, they had set aside in 1869 for a botanical reserve to the Broken Hill Propriety Limited to build a steelworks. Other heavy industry followed, and Newcastle became an industrial city. Growing up in Newcastle we were taught to be proud of the fact that we lived in 'the largest industrial city in the Southern Hemisphere'. We were unaware at the time that the rest of Australia regarded it as a dirty, ugly industrial city inhabited by a lot of 'bolshis' who'd go on strike at the drop of a hat. In one respect they were right. The pollution was horrendous but it was a pollution which at that time we accepted as necessary – coal trucks trundling by and black smoke belching forth over the city meant employment. Management was not concerned with the social or human cost for, like the absentee landlords in the Caribbean in the earlier centuries, they didn't live there.

The history of Newcastle is a history of exploitation. It has from the beginning been a working-class city and it remains so. Its workers have contributed greatly to the economic wealth of Australia but little of this wealth has been returned to the city. As J.C. Docherty remarked in his book on Newcastle, 'Outsiders, both public and private have treated Newcastle like a colonial possession': absentee ownership, poor infrastructure, no security for the work force, destruction of landscape, and plain poverty – all these are well-known features of exploitation but so too is the image of the exploited group. It therefore comes as no surprise that the image of a person from Newcastle is one of an aggressive, uncultured person addicted to pubs and poker machines.

This issue is to help dispel this image. The quality of the creative writing speaks for itself, and the scenes from 'The Newcastle Quilt' exhibit the skills of the artist and celebrate the charm of the city as well as the beauty of the beaches which even two centuries of industry have not managed to destroy. The restoration of much of the natural beauty and the creation of a cultural life in the city have been achieved essentially through the same process that has been with Newcastle from the beginning – that of self-help.

I agree with one of Newcastle's most popular mayors, Joy Cummings, who in defiance of outside hostility to Newcastle said: 'It is a special town, a special warm town.'

ANNA RUTHERFORD

Hospitalizing

Veronica Ballod sits in a train travelling north. She has forgotten that once trains meant connection with glamorous places, so that whenever she saw or heard one her heart yearned to be on it, going there. Not staying here. Or rather, she hasn't forgotten, she remembers it as a fond desultory fact, long past its use-by date. Train travel is a chore, now. Planes are what is glamorous, planes to Europe. The destination, if not the vehicle. The cities of home are known.

Then, after Sydney, she recalls it again, in the gut, where memory counts. She looks at the backyards sloping down to the railway line, the grass as green as an Irish bog, lush, mowed, but nothing cultivated, the fences reduced to sheaves of palings, the morning glory vines gobbling everything, the sheds for wood and junk, the clotheslines, sometimes a tree. No gardens: these are backyards, private spaces of earth and air open to the view of every passing train passenger. She is a child again, coming from the coast where the trees hunch dry-leaved against the gales, and this is where exotic begins. Going now the other way. Back.

The house was dark, and very cold. Living in Canberra you forget how cold Newcastle got. Here the wind didn't slice like a knife, it roared in from the sea, blustering, it picked up the frail houses in its teeth and shook them. They groaned, cracks opened, they shuddered with draughts and eddies of air. People said their roofs were filled with sand, tons of it blown in on these winds; that sometimes the ceiling couldn't hold and collapsed with killing weight on the occupants, unless they were lucky enough to be out. Though Veronica knew of no specific examples. She couldn't remember when she'd been on her own in this house before. With the groaning of the timbers and the roaring of the wind she could have been at sea. In a vessel unseaworthy and likely to founder. Like the old tin mission, shaking off its anchorings, setting sail, out past Nobby's, a danger to shipping as well as itself. How far did it get before it sank? Did anybody know?

She prowled around the house. It was late, but she didn't feel like going to bed. She opened cupboards and drawers, not looking for anything, not looking at anything. Simply registering. The button box. The string in the coffee canister. The soup tureen of recipes in the kitchen

cabinet whose glass doors rattled, so when you crept past it too late home you held your breath, tested the floor, but still were not always successful in not setting them off, the glass doors transparent and sliding, more modern than the open-out colour-stained and leaded kind, but they'd've been quieter. Not this sort of early - late - warning system. She jumped up and down in front of it. The noise of the rattling glass was very loud inside the hollow shell of the roaring winter's night outside. She checked the board in the hall, the back-up trap; still the same long-drawn creak. Though father had a number of times crawled under the house to try to fix it. When you stood on it and it sounded and you froze, you understood how ineluctable fate was: when you took your foot off it, it would creak back into place again. However long you waited. Like the second boot.

You would think of the noises that alerted others to your presence, now, when there was nobody to hear, nobody to care.

It was strange to look at other people's objects when they weren't there to temper you gaze. These things that when their mother was at home belonged to her daughters too, but in her absence proclaimed themselves her possessions. And the other things that in the busyness of daily life went un-examined. Over the sideboard was a blown-up photograph. *Ships at Stockton NSW C 1906* said the caption. They were sailing ships, no funnels, with powerful masts and crosspieces and all the careful tracery of ropes, the sky of the picture full of their shapely pencil lines, long diagonals, sometimes cross-hatched into ladders, and horizontal loops and somewhere, though they were not to be seen, would have been the men who knew what they all meant, who could unfurl the sails, lower and raise them, turn them so they caught the breeze or slipped through the gales. Here they were moored several deep to the wharf. Graceful boats, with curving prows and strong bowsprits: George would have known the names, barques perhaps, barquentines, schooners, windjammers, and their cargo: it was coal, wasn't it. Since she was a young woman, when George brought it proudly home and hung it from the picture rail (not at all Alice's idea of a work of art) she'd seen this picture, and never thought to ask. And look, figureheads, curved women white against the black prows, arms crossed, draperies fluttering back, or perhaps it was wings. At the sign of the Flying Angel. Breasting the waves, breasts to the waves: angels and ministers of grace, keeping safe.

They that go down to the sea in ships, said the psalm. These see the works of the Lord. What it particularly meant was, the violent ones. The furies of the Lord. In weather like this Nobby's would have flown the flag, Bar Dangerous. Meaning that trying to enter the harbour could wreck your ship. Witness the approaches sown with carcasses. The bones of

fifty ships lie on the oyster bank alone, this shoal of shifting sands where anchors do not hold. Vessels would be lost and all the people in them within sight, at stone's throw people said, of calm water. In one place there are five in a single heap: *Wendouree*, *Lindus*, *Colonist*, *Cawarra*, *Adolphe*, one on top of the other.

What could you do when the harbour, the port, the safe place was too dangerous to enter? Wait in the roads until the storm abated. Hope not to be cast on the rocks. And even when you were actually in port, it wasn't always much safer. When the winds blew ships thrashed about at the wharves, at those berths three and four deep, damaging themselves and their neighbours, or broke free of their moorings and collided in the congestion, grounded, capsized.

How calm it is in the picture. The frozen moment. Twilight perhaps when the light has clarity but not warmth. Two horses graze. This photograph is a Grecian urn of perfect forever. At this moment, entirely safe. No gales can touch it.

And the men, not to be seen: maybe they are off at the Missions to Seamen just across the wharf – in 1906 still the old tin building – falling in love with the pretty lasses. *Forever wilt thou love and she be fair*. No. Not all of them, anyway. She's never noticed before. There are men in the photographs, not down on the deck where she'd been looking for them, where the finely planked life boats hang, but high up, in the rigging, perched on yard-arms, where the sails are partly furled. Tiny figures. They seem to be looking at the camera. Perhaps they are actually posing, for the photographer standing just where she is. On the grass, with his shuttered telescoping apparatus taking their picture. The horses are blurry round the edges, and there is a figure that looks like a little girl running across the grass, smudging her space, in the time the shutter was closing. Maybe the ropes are so clearly delineated because they too moved as the picture was being taken, occupying more space than the eye could ever perceive.

Veronica remembers Mikelis saying how he loves the solemnness of faces in old photographs. Because the picture took a while to take, not the split second as now. As though that time necessary imparted your real face, not just the fleeting image of it; its substance, its character. As though a bigger chunk of your life had been captured.

Thinking of Mikelis makes her feel lonely in the empty house. She goes into Alice's bedroom, and that's worse. Her mother is so much not there, in this room as it's always been, in the immemorial placing of objects: the pink china basket with a china rose on the side, the pin-cushion stuck with hat-pins, the cut glass lidded bowl where Alice keeps now little poems she cuts out of the paper, ornaments and trinket boxes, which her daughters once gave her and now find hideous, which

Alice still treasures. It's orderly, no evidence here of the accident, the emergency departure.

She's well, the hospital says, she's resting, as well as can be expected with a broken leg, not a light thing breaking bones at her age, but she's doing well. Veronica thinks of the hospital on its headland, its lighted floors like the decks of an ocean liner, it too breasting the stormy night. She doesn't want to think of her mother slipping over in this lonely house. Lying with doubled up leg a day and a night. Needing the neighbour to notice the paper not brought in. So frail a hold on life and safety: the neighbour noticing the paper. She was wandering a bit, said Josie, the neighbour. She kept talking about the Japanese. Something about them having blocks of wood for pillows. They're lucky, she said, they have blocks of wood for pillows.

Walking through the hospital Veronica had found again the Monet painting of the window at the end of a corridor, the bands of green colours, sand, sea, sky, hazed in the light of its own spray and by the salt-encrusted glass. Just as when she'd come to visit Martin. All the people in all the years who'd passed through this hospital, and still there were windows like Monet paintings. This was a different floor from Martin's; she imagined them ranged one above the other, a series, like haystacks, or water-lilies. This was their winter phase, greenish and subtle; in summer it would be primary blue and yellow, with people, maybe the red sails of windsurfers. Dufy cheerful.

Alice's room looked across the green park where the helicopters landed, to the sea that way. She sat propped up in bed, not close enough to the window to see what happened on the ground with the helicopters, but able to observe brief moments of their rise and fall, when the swift blades of the rotors chopped the silence into chunks that tumbled their noise into the waiting hospital. Just as well. The helicopter meant damage and fear. Saving people, perhaps, but after what disaster.

Alice wonders how she feels. Do you have any pain, the nurses ask. If she says yes they give her some pills. Sometimes she says yes, sometimes no. There is a pain, there is always a pain. She can't grasp it. She isn't sure it should go away. There hadn't been pain on the bathroom floor. That was a black space, and no pillow. Even the Japanese who don't have pillows have blocks of wood to rest on. With a pain you know you are there. It drags at you, holds you in place. You won't float off into black space, out into that dangerous air where the helicopters chop the silence into chunks that tumble down and bruise the ears. Alice has had plenty of pains in her life, but has never got into the habit of taking pills for them.

There are four women in the ward. Near the window on the right is Marie Dare. No one ever visits her. She says in a clear voice: I am bored. I am so bored I am counting my pills to pass the time. She shakes them into her hand and counts them back one by one into the paper cup. She gets to seventeen. In fact there are only nine. To pick them up and swallow them she feels in the palm of her hand. She is almost blind. Miss Dare she is, though most of the nurses call her Marie. Or darling. When they breeze in and take you by the hand. Are you all right, darling? they say. Oh sweetheart, all your bedclothes are on the floor. They bustle and smile and put a shield of friendly energy around the old women. Who flourish briefly, until the nurses swirl off to the next ward.

Near the door on the right is Doreen. She has a startling beauty that the ruin of her old age only makes more poignant. Her hair is silky white ringlets and her eyes summer sea blue. She is a woman out of a drawing room comedy. She needs to make conquests all the time. She tells stories out of play scripts; the other women hear them over and over, see them being polished, see the art with which she offers herself. She adores men. Men are always right. She dotes on her grandson, her granddaughter is okay, some of the time. Her daughter can do nothing right. It's always the wrong nightie, or she's late, or too soon, or hasn't remembered the curlers or the book or the bed-jacket she ought to have known her mother would want. For sons and sons-in-law there's charming petulance and flirtatious demands. She has always been charming and beloved, little girl to old lady. The darling of daddy and uncles and then of lovers, husbands, and now of sons and lovers.

Doreen tells stories, she woos, she croons, she manipulates. Darling, she says to the nurses, sweetheart, the sheets are wrinkled, the light's too bright, my head hurts, I have to have a cup of tea. Her endearments are the velveting of her iron. Alice takes mild malicious pleasure in noticing that she is deserted by syntax and betrayed by grammar. In Alice's family people have always spoken well, even if they weren't much educated. No yous or aints. Marie Dare wishes she'd shut up. She's sick of her wingeing.

In the left hand bed near the window is Betty. She has a visitor who sits on a chair beside the bed. From time to time they have a conversation though they don't look at one another as they speak.

- Did you sit in the chair?
- Yes. I sat in the chair.
- Yes. I used to sit in the chair.
- I sat in the chair for quite a long time.
- You don't want to get cold, sitting in the chair.
- No.

- You've got to watch you don't get a chill.
- I wouldn't want to get a chill.
- Shouldn't sit in the chair too long.

If Doreen is illiterate Noel Coward it is Pinter writing Betty and her friend. He's coached them in the delivery too: slowly, slowly, slow down! Pauses: the strength is in the pauses. Make your audience wait for the next word. It's as if the words are musical notes, and they are gentle jazz musicians, trading slow improvisations.

- They're lovely looking kids. That youngest kiddie.
- Yes. Lovely.
- She's always kept them nice.
- Yes. Lovely. A real credit.
- Lovely things she puts them in.
- Yes. She looks after them. Something lovely.
- Mm. She looks after them. They're a real credit.
- Her mother was good like that.
- Yes. She liked things nice.

The hour is nearly up. Time for one more.

- The Chinaman's wife, she had a stroke.
- Oh.
- Yes. A stroke. On Sunday.
- The Chinaman's wife.
- Yes.
- She had a stroke, did she.
- Yes. On Sunday.

Alice sits in her bed, on the left hand near the door, and watches these performances with the interested eyes of a child. You can see the serious and rather worried small girl she must have been. But she's enjoying the shows, happy to let the spectacle unfold around her. Alice never wanted starring roles, never sought the limelight. But she's about to offer a performance of her own. Out of town daughter paying a visit.

When Veronica came into the ward all the women watched her walk up to her mother and put her arms round her, fearfully, shocked by the frailty of her bones. She sat by the bed and held Alice's hand, bending over, resting her head, pretending to rest her head, on the tiny bony shoulder, so that her mother wouldn't see her eyes filled with tears. The hand was as soft and cool as always; it released a memory of all the years of her mother's touch. And the feel of her cheek as she kissed. Her mother's famous complexion, famous like an Austen

heroine's for its rosy pink and cream colours but fine too, the texture as well as the colour of rose petals, fresh and fragrant soft as they. Wrinkled now, the petals creased and crumpled, but still fine and cool.

Veronica's tears were not entirely for Alice, they were for Veronica's looming loss of Alice. Of course she worried about her mother, the pain, the terrible black space of the day, the night, the day, lying on the bathroom floor, the jostle and prod and pry of death too close and neither of them knowing how to talk about it. She wanted her mother comfortable, happy, unanxious, and she wanted her mother. Alice was sitting up in bed like a small girl who'd lost hers and Veronica wanted to be her child again as well as a competent grown-up person looking after her. She thought there are no grown-up people. No one to make it all right. No mothers any more. We're all children. Except the nurses who do it as a job. In miserly little parcels.

A nurse came in. This is my daughter, said Alice, with pride. The nurse dispensed pills in paper cups. She talked in a very loud voice. Why does she shout, whispered Veronica. She thinks everybody's deaf, said Alice. Nearly everybody is. I'm glad I'm not.

It hadn't ever occurred to Veronica that being able to whisper at your mother was a luxury.

Doreen called out to be introduced and when Veronica was leaving she came over, took her hand, kissed her, all heartfelt goodbye, doing her best to add Veronica to her circle of admirers. Watching her trying to appropriate her daughter Alice thought of all the people she'd have made jealous throughout her life, all the people who'd have watched in impotent rage as she stole their lovers, children, husbands. Suppose that everybody had somewhere a kind of spirit figure, a sort of alter ego voodoo doll that kept the scars and bruises of all the kicks blows scratches stabs that people had thought against them; what a mess Doreen's would be.

You're so lucky, she said to Alice, to have such a *kind* daughter. Her voice wistful, her eyes teary.

In the corridor Veronica met Helen Murphy who'd done radiography training with her. Helen used to be in demand when they had practical inspections because she was thin, it was easy to find her bones. You didn't ask people with cushions of fat hiding their skeletons to be your patient. They'd stayed Christmas card friends, and Veronica sometimes looked her up when she came to Newcastle. Now she was greatly pleased to see her.

What are you doing here? they both asked, delicately, in case the reasons were bad. Helen's face went wan, and out flooded words.

It's my mother. She's broken her hip. But that's not the real problem. The trouble is, she doesn't remember anything. Not anything. Not even

that she's broken her hip. She keeps trying to get out of bed because she thinks she can walk. She doesn't remember that she falls over when she stands up. She forgets that she had a cup of tea a minute ago. I suppose she knows who I am, I'm not sure about that, but when I go out the door she doesn't remember I've been. I go to the nurses' station and back and she behaves as though she hasn't seen me for ten years.

Veronica felt a pang of gratitude for Alice's intact mind. Helen went on with her story, down the stairs, across the car park – she was giving Veronica a lift – in the car, over coffee at the Merewether house. Her mother had been living with her, until the broken hip, physically well enough but needing constant vigilance. Having no memory, said Helen, it's a living death. She isn't herself any more.

She'd been in the lavatory when it happened. Had forgotten her knickers were down around her ankles, had stood up and tipped over. Against the door, so they couldn't open it to get her out. Helen had huge dark circles under her eyes, where the skin had an opalescent bronze sheen. It would have been quite beautiful had people admired that kind of thing. Veronica thought of the days when her skinny bones had been in demand by radiography students. She'd be even more useful now.

I wish she'd die, said Helen. Not for me, I don't mean for me, I think I don't, I mean for her, she's not herself, what's the use of going on living when she's not herself. Hurting and miserable and not even remembering why or that this isn't how it always is.

Nobody tells you how to deal with these sorts of things, said Veronica. They tell you how to have babies and how to bring them up and what to do when problems come with school and teenagers and stuff, not always useful but at least it gives you something to go against, something to help you work out what might be right for you by rejecting, but your parents and getting old and death maybe ... you're on your own.

Yes, said Helen. I suppose nobody knows. Who knows about death? I don't. And I don't believe people who reckon they do.

Veronica sorted out photographs and took them into the hospital for Alice to identify. It was a kind of pastime, it hid the fact that there wasn't always a lot of conversation to make. But important too, if the pictures were to be a record. Alice's remembering was faultless and fast. Veronica wrote the names of people and the places, and if not the dates the periods of them on the backs. They laughed and talked about them, both ignoring the darker meaning, that this had to be done before it was too late, and the information died with its owner. *When a person*

dies a library dies; this is a black American saying that Mikelis read in the newspaper and liked to quote, but Veronica did not say it aloud at this moment.

There was an envelope of sepia snaps gone yellowish, and their bottoms were cut off. The figures were reduced to heads and shoulders; girls in lacy pin-tucked pale pretty dresses presumably and hats that dipped at the back and framed bright-eyed faces. They were Alice and Lily, Nell and Rose, with Vic and George. Some were just Alice and George, side by side, their heads at conscious angles. They were just as recognizably courting photographs as others are wedding photographs. The time was 1927, and some years later Alice had cut them off above the waist because she thought the dresses looked silly. Veronica had always scolded her for this, because in her eyes the fashions were beautiful, much more so than the dull clothes of the next decades. I suppose you're right, said Alice, peering at the fine needlework of the top halves, they are pretty, but just afterwards, you know, those shapeless dresses and the waists round the hips, they made you look like the side of a house, and we just thought, how could we have worn such things.

Oh mother. You thought you could change history, cut it away, expunge it from people's minds. But you can't, you know. Veronica produced another envelope: Alice had missed these, they hadn't been doctored. There they were, the no-waists in full glory, and droopy hems dipping down to little pale leather curvaceous shoes.

Louis heels. Alice smiled, pleased. See, how broad in the beam we looked, she said.

But gorgeous.

Sixty years. Silly things we were. If we'd known then ...

What a horror. It's just about the only good luck people have. That they don't know what's in store for them.

Do you think it was so bad? Alice spoke with a kind of mild curiosity, as though she were gossiping, which didn't deceive Veronica.

Oh, I don't mean it was bad. Not to live through. But if you saw all your life spread out ahead of you, well, you'd quail. Don't you think? It's dealing with one thing and then the next that makes you able to cope. And getting older, and ... not wiser, but more used to it.

Until there aren't any more things left to deal with. Or only one.

Veronica squeezes her mother's hand. She thinks she means death, dying. This is her chance to speak of these things, as received wisdom has it, to be open about this final fact of life, not leave her to face it alone. But she is scared, she doesn't know how, she hears clumsy words, dangerous, clanging in the air between them, she can't take the chance. Instead she dodges. Well, you're not there yet, she says. Still a

million things to do. She picks up the faded photographs of the long ago young people in their fancy clothes.

The background seemed to be a framework of skewed and rusty metal. Where are you, exactly, asked Veronica.

That's the *Adolphe*, said Alice. The wreck of the *Adolphe*. She was lost on the Oyster Bank, oh, before I was born. You could get to her from the Stockton Breakwater. It was something people did on Sunday afternoons. You took the ferry across and walked along the Breakwater to the *Adolphe*. She'd been a beautiful boat. French, George said, a wind-jammer, I think. But just a shell by then. Filled with concrete.

What a way to spend Sunday afternoon. Getting all dressed up to go and stroll on a wreck.

Taking the air.

Wasn't it rather melancholy?

I don't remember. It was what you did. I do recall George and Rose having a terrible argument, though. But they were always doing that.

After a fortnight Veronica had to go back to Canberra. Elinor drove up the day before, and Veronica handed over to her. She'd talked to the woman who specialized in geriatrics at the hospital, a tall severe clever person. She had a number of young doctors, registrars and students, working with her; they were warm and friendly to the patients and their relations. They touched the old people with gentle hands, rested their palms on their shoulders, even gave them hugs. It seemed a good thing that they found their charges lovable. There was quite a lot of scope for them to practise their speciality; Newcastle had an ageing population. Dr Pulowski was strict, she would not offer hope where it wasn't due. Alice was doing as well as could be expected; she is an old woman, said Dr Pulowski. Veronica reported all this to Elinor. Every day the families of patients try to catch the doctors and ask how things are going, there might be news, a change, an improvement of course is what they want, and they need to be sure that the doctors keep thinking of them.

When visiting hours were over the sisters went to the Italian restaurant in Islington. Over dinner they caught up on their own news. Elinor was trying to work out how to get back to France to write a book with a woman called Flora Hart whom she'd met when she was last there, a book about women's lives in the seventeenth century, from the lady of a castle down to the scullery maid. At home afterwards at the Merewether house she opened a bottle of wine, and they sat at the dining table. Veronica told the story of the woman with no memory. Even animals remember, she said. They remember what they need to know.

This night wasn't stormy, the sound of the sea was very quiet in the night air, with no wind racketing about. Just the endless muted breaking turning breaking of the waves. *The sea is calm tonight*, said Elinor. The women felt the house full of melancholy, they were aware of finitude. This house and the family life in it which had for so long been available for them whenever they wanted it was slipping away. Alice breathing lightly, in the high hospital bed made an adult cot by its raised chrome bars, Alice's thin breath was the fraying thread that held it.

This is an extract from a work in progress, called *The Tin Mission, A Hundred Year Novel*. The title refers to the old Missions to Seamen building of Newcastle port, which was washed out to sea in a storm, in 1912.

WHAT DO THESE WRITERS HAVE IN COMMON?

Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo, Thea Astley, E. Kamau Brathwaite, Erna Brodber, J.M. Coetzee, David Dabydeen, Nadine Gordimer, Wilson Harris, Marion Halligan, Jack Hodgins, Chris Koch, Bob Marley, Frank Moorhouse, Alice Munro, Les A. Murray, Caryl Phillips, Olive Senior, Wole Soyinka, Randolph Stow, Aritha van Herk, Derek Walcott, Rudy Wiebe.

KUNAPIPI!

Earthquake

TREPIDATIONS

The end of your last year at school,
the earthquake struck? occurred?
bare noun with its seismic verb
earth quake is itself, the word shouted
200 miles away while we were
down the bottom of Blue Hole Gorge:
last outing of the many that got us through
the past eighteen years, and we didn't hear it
but I tell myself I felt it.

If you didn't know the history of Australia
a bottom of a gorge
could be the disturbed foundations of Harrapa
blocks of granite cradled by young she-oaks
the untidy streets laid and swept
by the seasonal labour of streams
sasaparilla planters in dry eddies,
garbage dumps in crooks of trees,
and white tails of paper signposts of sewers up-river,
pediments, architraves, ashlars
rough-hewn by entropy, fate of a kind.
You can climb over it, Schliemanns
looking for the real meaning of a text called Home:
I have never found it, mine is still 200 miles away, and you?
- where will your dreams be in twenty-five years time?
Mine, no matter what I do, have me waking in two houses
my grandmother's at the lake
- quiet water-light, polished wood, and the smell of tarred marlin -
and my old room back in the city
breathing surf, and wind drowned cries of kids on the beach -

for you, the dull laminex of tableland skies, bars for
the pub gossip of currawongs at the early opener.

But we were climbing, going down river,
when I stopped, 50 feet above the bottom
and watched you trace the labyrinth some master mason had laid.
I heard the dull boom of a jet and
watched its con-trail make a parabola of the day
and the sun pitch up towards it,
then you appear from a fault at water level and wave.
It's one of those moments when
the years hang balanced, and you wait – wait
for a sign to erupt from the sense of things.

EARTH QUAKE

Looking at the horizon, cold blue line, blinding
if too long, it starts to move, wave,
not regular as breathing, more a sliding
and rearing, noiseless, tea-cup circled
from up here through binoculars on the warm concrete path –
not like anything living, but rolling cold
quicksilver purposeful, running
to currents we will never know, twins
untwinning, meeting and sundering, line
and points of blue south, boxed
by the mind and nothing else. Cold comfort horizon.

The harbour shore is out of reach of the swell except
in the worst gales, or when the Aleutians heaved and humped
a tide of their own years ago swollen four times in a day
in the groin of our estuary, strange visitor – like bitou bush
and boulders beached to make land of swamp. Stones
brought as ballast from roads, or broken bits of buildings,
Frisco oh six, they sailed you bit by bit across the Pacific.
My Dad said there were silver dollars, belt buckles, taps and pipes,
to be picked up and put on Stockton mantlepieces, dusted
and then thrown out when grandma died, shifting one chaos
to get order in another. In one piece of plaster lath

you can read a city, fit it together, gathered in to make it new.
Shores have lines of random ruin, tide and weather we cannot read,
but stones and harbours are our emblem of an order out of water.

Home is the house where, place of absences, sign
of things hidden, the chook-run, air-raid shelter, shells
set in cement paths – but now a place of movement, meant
to show you that unlike horizons and harbours, home harbours
horizons you never imagined. When you come back after the shock,
gaps have opened, sand sprung from ceilings, plaster placings
not peeled but sliced sideways to show dadoes unseen since
just after the war – blue stencil of sky above a picture rail,
inside bedrooms and verandahs now with walls of air, eyries
for suburban sea eagles patrolling their beaches from lounge rooms,
eyes out for change in the weather or after-shocks off the rocks
in untroubled sea while swells swirl everywhere inside.
Home to count the costs, to cut the crusts off the hard bread
of week-old suffering. Home to find the horizon moved and not put
back,
and the harbour shore covered now with your own cups and pipes.

FAULTS

Too possessive by half
I wanted to hang on to everything:
the past, the moment, that phrase,
a photo, a sound, that tune:
finally it all had to come undone.

We sit on bentwood chairs
in the tea room my mother took me to:
looking through a fourth floor window
across the harbour: dykes, groynes
and docks, the water still as life.

Cracks are everywhere, even in window sills
where seasons of summers have split the wood:

but the cracks everyone is talking about
are there in the walls, the pavements, and in the shock
which still echoes in their speech.

Fourth floor, forty years, accumulating faults
waiting for something to slip and slide
and the new and dangerous to be turned out.
But at what cost? I hang on,
toes and fingers straining as continents drift apart

or squeeze together, creep and crawl, walk and then run,
the earth is elastic. Forty years and I sip my tea
and watch the still life of the harbour.
The forgotten ships, their smoke and steam
streamers of melting signs, shimmer in the hard light.

It's no use pointing them out to you,
empty wharves and broken buildings are what you see:
at the end we live in different worlds
and talk other languages, a fault line between
one time and another where friction and new order live.

SUBURBS

Two young women stand on the grass slope above the beach

a broiling thunderhead haystacks high in the south,
it's February and there are floods

the wind presses a shift against one's cleft of buttocks
the other is pregnant and she faces the wind
the future outlined against her dress

their men are hang-gliding
a blast of colour flies upward from the bluff –
a hawk was hunting there this morning
wings twitching like a dog's nose

as hungry as I was when I wrote a poem to one
at Nambucca eighteen years ago

the boyfriend hurtles past body-bagged
hanging from primary colours after nothing but the wind

Around the corner two houses have gone
a fibro garage is left of one
two plywood wardrobes of the other
the bricks of both split into ziggurats by the shocks
were bulldozed by a council eager to forget.
Fifty years ago a married couple moved into one
and lived there until last week and now they're gone.
Who'll build there now? The new tribe of the young and rich.

The southerly's arrived – wind bangs around the place
the women hug themselves
and yell at men to pack their kites before the storm,
and so I watch, as I did eighteen years ago
when I wrote I was a hungry hawk hunting in stony woods.

ASSESSING THE DAMAGE

A fortnight later we walked into town through drizzling rain. Humphrey's store was damaged as was the service station opposite. Darby Street was a via dolorosa. No dramatic cave-ins into the street, but slightly bulging walls at Winchcombe Carson's wool store, and the debris from awnings at the stores around the Delaney. The weeping of bricks had stopped, even if the rain hadn't. We reach King Street and turn up there. There are signs of damage everywhere, but as yet nothing dramatic. We go down to Scott Street and see great clouds of dust rolling past the end of the Railway Station. A strange disembodied cloud as yet without drama. As we get closer we can see from the barricade a crawler with an arm and pincher astride a scree-like slope of rubble gnawing away at the walls of three storeys of bedrooms opening like a set in a vertical theatre. The prospect is not good enough, so by taking the bridge across the railway lines and coming around past the Customs House, happily not badly damaged, we can see clearly the action of the drama – the demolition of the George Hotel. Only the wall

common with Jerry's Fish Cafe is still standing – three to four storeys of it. The crawler like a fastidious eater breaking and removing pieces of crab, rips out the floors and makes matchwood, nuzzles a wall and sends it like a fall of water into veils of bricks followed by a huge cloud of dust. The smell of old soot is everywhere. Decades of loco smoke from the station, from Zara Street power station, from the tugs at Kings Wharf, from the coal Frank Macnamara cut, from the chimneys of the pub itself hang in the air for the sixty or seventy of us to sample. Hoses play water on the dust to bring everything back to earth, and the crawler inches and shoves its way into the shell like a miner into a narrow seam. One room on the third floor remains intact. A red curtain flaps slowly through an outside window, its green door is resolutely shut. What is inside? Some, or one of the many furtive couples who must have used it in the past? Some recluse? Some tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor marking off days until his ship came in, his girl returned? We all wait as the crawler gnaws at the lower courses of the bricks. The room remains like a pigeon loft left unperturbed, its curtain leisurely blowing as if someone were about to twitch it open and stick their head out to see what all the noise is about. But no one does. The bites of brickwork get larger – a wall undulates, waving as if held together by the outside paint the inside wallpaper, and finally lets go. But still the room remains intact. The door shut. This is too much. The crawler reaches up to the window with the lazy curtain. It opens its six fingered fist – three poke through the glass which explodes with a recognisable sound, and the lower three into the brickwork – then pulls. The wall comes out, and the room is exposed. There is a sink and a chest-of-drawers. The fist closes and punches right and then left. The architrave and door disintegrate and fall like an absurd surreal avalanche of the everyday. As if the sixty mortals next to me were suddenly turned into angels being thrown out of Paradise. On the wall, a mirror hangs, and two calendars, one rippling in the sudden exposure to the breeze. A room with green wall-paper and electrical fittings, full of a spirit which as I watch pours out into the street. One of the calendars falls down, not on to the floor, that no longer exists, but flutters through several storeys into the ruin in the pit which the crawler bestrides. Here there are gutters and fire hoses, water pipes and lift engines, tiles and taps, the whole entropy of a hotel, and the smell of soot, long dead.

AFTER SHOCK

My school-friend said we lost our childhoods –
the school has certainly gone,
and you can see into alien spaces
blank and bright as empty picture frames.

What's left is probably more important –
the sense of everything
changed, not utterly,
but randomly, without purpose:

the war memorial soldier cut off at the ankles,
the brick bunker of the Catholic school
breached, our Primary sundered, the two
one, and new foundations for everything.

Goodbye to childhood and kid's games,
the sand has moved, the tide come in
and our castles must be left for the night
and the clean bare sand of the dawn.

On 28 December 1989, the city of Newcastle was hit by the first major earthquake to strike Australia. Many were killed, particularly at Newcastle Workers' Club, and many of the major buildings in the city and inner suburbs were destroyed.

The Loquat Tree

There we are for the last time, Grandpa and I under the loquat tree. He is sitting on the highbacked oak chair and his expression, captured forever in black and white, is one of mild surprise.

I feel myself on his lap again and smile and the long shadows of the loquat tree angle out behind us. His warm flannels prickle my cheek and the strong beat of his heart pulses in my ear.

Grandpa's top teeth are in for a big smile for the camera. I feel with my finger but no; no bottom ones. I cup my hands around his big fuzzy ears, 'all the better to hear you with' and snap his fireman's braces.

'Be a good girl now. Sit still.'

He blows a raspberry on my neck. I laugh. Click! A big hug for Grandpa's girl and a pink and white boiled lolly. My uncles come home from the pits and pose, arms locked around each other's shoulders.

'How about taking our picture?' They laugh and their teeth shine white in their coal-dusted faces.

'Get along with you. You're as black as arabs. Come on, help Dad inside.'

My mother and my aunt fuss about and Grandpa puts his arm around my uncles' shoulders and they dolly-walk him up the path.

The wire handles of the kerosene-tin buckets chatter as the water heats for the men's baths. Droplets spit and dance on the black-leaded stove top and on the side, in a cream enamel basin, camphor oil vaporizes as it warms for Grandpa's legs.

I watch the big boys through the kitchen window. They leap at the overhanging branches of the loquat and slap the heavy orange clusters with their rulers. My aunt taps on the window at them, and Grandpa blows on his strong black tea. No sugar. My grandpa is sweet enough.

'Let the children be, Mary. What's a few squashed loquats on the foot-path.'

In the holidays, they play in the street and I sit on the fence post and talk to them. I give them windfalls, all washed and clean in a big

dipper. They bring their balls and home-made bats and play cricket, a butter-box for a wicket. And we watch them, Grandpa and I all the sunny afternoons.

Sometimes the ball comes over the hedge.

'It's a sixer Grandpa,' I tell him.

Grandpa cheers and claps and passes his bag of boiled lollies over the fence to them, while I fox the ball.

They come for a week maybe. Then a policeman comes. He knocks on the back door and stands on the low step looking out into the yard. He speaks very softly to my aunt.

'.....doesn't want to upset a job to do complaints.'

'Complaints!!' My aunt's voice is loud and angry. She calls to my mother. They stand close in the door-way.

'An old man giving children sweets fruit only doing my job.'

I cannot tell who is speaking: my mother's and my aunt's voices are one.

'Trouble-making bad minded old cows he's..... crippled half blind!'

The policeman's ears are very red. He doesn't even say goodbye to me at the gate.

They whisper in the kitchen, my mother and my aunt.

'How will we tell him?'

They don't have to. Grandpa has big ears to hear you with.

Now we sit on the other side of the house where the violets border the onions and the spinach. If I stand on the top of the coal heap, I can see right down to Payne's paddock. I can see the pit ponies. I jump up and down and sing.

'I'm the king of the castle and you're the dirty rascal.'

'What's wrong Grandpa? You've got coal dust in your eyes? I'll kiss you and make you better.'

The boys come back and rob the tree. They take all the fruit from the loquat near the fence. The broken branches hang down, dying.

Sweat runs down the coal dust on my uncle's arms as the axes bite and the wood-chips and wedges fly. I dance about among their legs, hitting at them with balled fists.

'It's my Grandpa's and mine tree.' Screaming for them to stop.

'Bad girl. Do as you're told. Go inside.'

I rush up the hall to a barricade of white aprons and restraining arms.

'No. No. Not now. Grandpa is sick. His legs are hurting.'

I watch him round the half closed bed-room door. The light is on. He is reading with his magnifying glass. The white and blue enamel candle-stick holder is balanced on his chest and the flame of the candle wavers with his breath. I slip around the door and climb up on the little stool beside his bed and unscrew the brass bed-knob. I take out the little white paper bag. One sweetie for me and one for Grandpa. My book is under my arm and my hair curls, still damp on my neck.

I lean on the side of his bed and whisper in his big sea-shell ear.

'When I'm a big girl I'll read to you Grandpa. I will. Every night.'

He kisses me on the forehead. 'Who's the best girl in the world?'

'Once upon a time' He reads slowly.

'Don't forget your prayers.'

The lino is cold and I pull my nightdress under my knees.

'God bless Mummy and Daddy and keep him safe. God bless backyards.' All you have to do is put a Dac-pot in them and pick up the wind-falls, like any other fruit-tree. They're back in favour now. Maybe it's the federation colours.'

What do you give to friends who have everything?

A SUBSCRIPTION TO KUNAPIPI.

The Newcastle That Henry Lawson Knew

In 1884, Henry Lawson left Sydney by steamship for Newcastle, a sea port and coal-mining centre sixty nautical miles to the north. An apprentice coach painter employed by the Hudson Brothers, railway rolling stock manufacturers of Sydney, Lawson was to spend some months working at the firm's Wickham branch at the western end of the port of Newcastle. This experience brought the young writer into an environment unique in Australia, for Newcastle was an odd mix of coal-miners, railway men, wharf labourers, soap makers, brewery hands and coach-builders. That Lawson lived and worked in this environment at a formative stage of his life might have much altered him, but the effect on his published work was to be uneven. Clearly influenced by his close contact with the sea, his work shows few signs of the other lessons to be learned in Newcastle in the early 1880s.

After Lawson's parents parted in 1883, he worked with his father on small building contracts in country towns. However, his mother became concerned that he was drifting into poor company, so Henry was brought to Sydney and apprenticed as a coach-painter to Hudson Brothers.¹ He worked so 'hard and well' that his initial wage of twenty-five shillings a week was soon increased to thirty shillings, a welcome addition to the family's meagre income.²

This apprenticeship committed Lawson to several years in the paint shops of one of the largest manufacturing firms in New South Wales. In Sydney and at Newcastle the Hudsons built a wide range of rolling stock for the railways of the colony. Hundreds of carriages, mail vans, prison vans, hearses, powder vans, covered vans and brake vans were produced by a large workforce using modern, labour-saving equipment. Visitors to the Newcastle plant wondered at the steam hammer, the iron-working machine tools and the various stem saws used to cut out wooden carriage sections: 'From the steam bellows that feed twenty five fires, to the apparatus for lifting up the top of a carriage, all are marvels of ingenuity'.³

Lawson, like his fellow apprentices, belonged to the lowest level of the labouring hierarchy and much of his time was spent in preparing

timber sections of the rolling stock for painting. Rubbing down required long hours of monotonous and physically tiring labour before more experienced painters applied the final coats and decorative flourishes. This task left Lawson with painful memories of 'the blood coming from my finger ends and trickling over the pumice stone' (H.L. p. 51). His ordeal was worsened by the tormenting 'Hudson Brothers larrikins' who, sensing his introverted nature and inferiority complex, made his life miserable. Although he claimed he 'was not tortured to an unendurable extent', Lawson thereafter carried with him a compassion for 'the poor, pale, delicate victim and butt of brutal ignorance' (H.L. p. 51).

Lawson appears to have been apprenticed to Hudson Brothers, although he worked under the direction of the Messrs. Clarke and Dean, who carried out the painting of the firm's rolling stock, as sub-contractors. It was to please them that Lawson reluctantly agreed to the move to Newcastle, a transfer which would not have been made, 'if I had not been so soft and willing' (H.L. p. 56).

Transport between Sydney and Newcastle was of necessity by sea, as a rail link had not yet been forged. Sailing was a new experience for seventeen-year-old Lawson, and he later recalled that 'as the steamer rose to the swell outside the heads, I drew a breath as deep as the sea itself' (H.L. p. 57). There is no record of young Henry's first impression of Newcastle, but as he passed Nobby's lighthouse to enter the estuary of the Hunter River, he saw what an earlier visitor had described as:

a strange, straggling, out-of-the-way, undescribable English Australian watering place, colliery village, oasis of greenness, Sahara-of-sand kind of place ... the whole town appears to have woke up in fright ... and to have no definite ideas of a rendezvous whereat to rally. Houses seemed to be running into the country in dismay.

Introduced by Clarke, of Clarke and Dean, to Smith, the foreman painter, the 'very green and very soft' Lawson had little chance of evading Smith's invitation to become his boarder in the cottage he occupied beside Hudson Brothers' plant at Wickham: 'This foreman half hurried, half bluffed me into boarding and lodging at his weatherboard humpy, where his missus always managed to get a skimpy, half cooked breakfast on the table a few minutes before the work-shop bell went' (H.L. p. 56). Years later, Lawson took his vengeance on Smith, whom he savagely condemned as:

a cur of the poodle species, a little man, with a tremendous opinion of his 'position', a set speech for every new hand containing cant about his employers, and very big feet that went straight ahead, or turned clumsily at rights angles

into pubs on Saturday nights. He had never been anything but a brush hand, and had never bossed a man – or even a crawler – before (H.L. p. 55).

Despite his low opinion of the foreman, Lawson wrote of the painting contractors: 'If Clarke or Dean ever read this book I want them to know that I have kindly recollections of them. Especially of Mr. Clarke, who was my immediate boss' (H.L. p. 57). Hudson Brothers also earned his regard as employers and patriots: '[they] were not Grinders... Their work was Australian. They imported the best mechanics they could get, treated and paid them well.... Their work for Australia deserved to be looked up a bit and credited to them' (H.L. p. 53).

Hudson's plant, one of the largest factories in Newcastle, employed almost 200 people and was established on three and a half acres containing seven large buildings linked together by an east-west roadway consisting of wooden paving cubes. In a description of the layout of the works, a contemporary journalist identified the principal buildings as the mill, fitting shop, blacksmith's shop, carriage shop, stables, store and the paint shop where Lawson worked:

The paint shop which is set apart for varnishing and polishing, and upholstering, is a rectangular building, 100ft. long x 30ft. wide. At our visit one end of the central rail-line was occupied by a railway carriage. This [the shop] is 8ft. 6in. wide, and, when the doors on both sides are thrown wide open, there is still ample room to allow the painters to arrange their trestles and other appliances without cramping their movements when at work. On one side of the carriage the grainer stood at work on the outside cedar panels of a door, on the other, another artistic workman was writing the number and designation of the compartment. 'Second Class', shading the gold lettering with vermilion, lake, white and black.⁴

Here, the homesick Lawson spent up to six days a week performing mechanical tasks while despairing about his want of education: 'I fretted, chafed and nearly worried my soul case out about "wasted time"' (H.L. p. 53). The alarm clock which heralded the five-o'clock start to Lawson's working day haunted him years later. 'There were times when I would have given my soul for another hour's sleep' (H.L. p. 53), he lamented when reflecting on his years of apprenticeship. However, his obsession for 'something better something higher' (H.L. p. 52) was undiminished. Unfortunately, educational opportunities for seventeen year old apprentices were very limited in Newcastle, a city of 30,000 people, and Lawson could do little except read. During the months spent there he 'haunted the School of Arts, still with an idea of learning before it was too late. I felt that I must take up some branch of study or other, and it seemed getting too late fast' (H.L. p. 55). The Newcastle School of Arts offered music and literary

entertainment, a circulating library, and a reading room equipped with a reference library and periodicals of the day.⁵ A Mechanics' Institute had also been established at Wickham, and Lawson would have been a frequent visitor to both institutions.

Miserably homesick, Lawson sought refuge in solitude and often walked along the wharves, where some of the world's most famous ships, including the 'Cutty Sark', awaited coal cargoes. As Bertha, Henry's wife, was to recall, 'Harry's favourite pastime was to walk along the river bank or out to Nobby's lighthouse to watch the ships'.⁶ The bustling harbour foreshores which attracted the lonely young lad offered a tantalising dream of adventure and escape from 'all those weary and unspeakably dark and dreary years of trouble, toil and longing for the world, and fearful, exquisite shyness of the world, of humiliation and heartbreak' (H.L. p. 57). His wife later reflected, perhaps with some bitterness, that she often thought 'it was the sight of that crowded, busy harbour and seeing the ships sailing, that aroused his wanderer's blood, and set him a-roving as he did later on'.⁷

However, amidst the spectacle and activity of the port, Lawson became aware of a darker aspect of the seafaring world, where 'the poverty of the workers, the terrible privations of seamen, and the way in which they were shanghaied on board the ships impressed his mind and depressed his soul'.⁸

Lawson's period in Newcastle was merely one part of his apprenticeship as a painter but it gave him the opportunity to observe an unusual community at an interesting stage of its development. The general prosperity of the Australian colonies in the early 1880s and the cartel then operated by the leading colliery proprietors ensured that mining was very profitable and wage rates were high. Unionism was also flourishing and there was a degree of optimism about Australian society that would soon be dissipated by the great strikes of 1888 and 1890 and by the severe depression which followed. Yet Lawson shows little sign in his published work of having lived through such a hopeful period. The creative works which reflect his years as an apprentice, such as 'Arvie Aspinall', 'Visit of Condolence', 'Two Boys at Grinder Brothers' and 'Jones's Alley', focus on themes of hardship and exploitation.

Of course there were individual cases of poverty and hardship in the Newcastle of 1884 but the miners, who worked within a mile of Lawson's home, often earned over ten shillings a day, and the smelting operatives up the river at Port Waratah received ten shillings every working day. This was double the wages of Lawson, who was also obliged to help support the family home in Sydney: 'I sent home every penny I had', he wrote, 'but was soon wanted at home, or my board money perhaps' (H.L. p. 56).

It is unfortunate that there is so little documentary evidence from this phase of Lawson's life and that his autobiography is so fragmentary. It would seem, however, that the personal problems he encountered as he grew from bush boy to urban man were so severe that they closed his mind to the more positive aspects of the lives of his fellow workers at Hudson Brothers. Poor, partially deaf, extremely sensitive, homesick and 'haunted by the dread of "growing up to be a man"' (H.L. p. 13), it is no wonder that he looked back on this period of his life with anguish.

My thanks to Dr. John Turner of the History Department, The University of Newcastle, for his assistance in preparing this article and to Jack Sullivan, of 72 Bar Beach Avenue, Bar Beach, N.S.W., 2300, Australia, who prepared the photographs.

NOTES

1. Colin Roderick, *Henry Lawson's Formative Years* (1960, Wentworth Press, Sydney), p. 14.
2. Henry Lawson, 'A Fragment of Autobiography', in Brian Kiernan (ed.) *The Portable Henry Lawson* (University of Queensland Press, 1976), p. 49. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text under H.L.
3. John Turner, *Manufacturing in Newcastle, 1801-1900* (Newcastle Public Library, 1980), p. 53.
4. *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 28th December, 1883.
5. *The Newcastle Directory and Almanac for the Year 1881*, p. 23.
6. Bertha Lawson, *My Henry Lawson* (Frank Johnson, Sydney, 1943), p. 19.
7. Bertha Lawson, p. 19.
8. *Ibid.*



'I worked at Hudson Bros.' branch work-shops at Wickham, Newcastle.'
Henry Lawson, *A Fragment of Autobiography*.

Hudson Brothers' Works.
(Snowball Collection, Newcastle Region Public Library Collection)



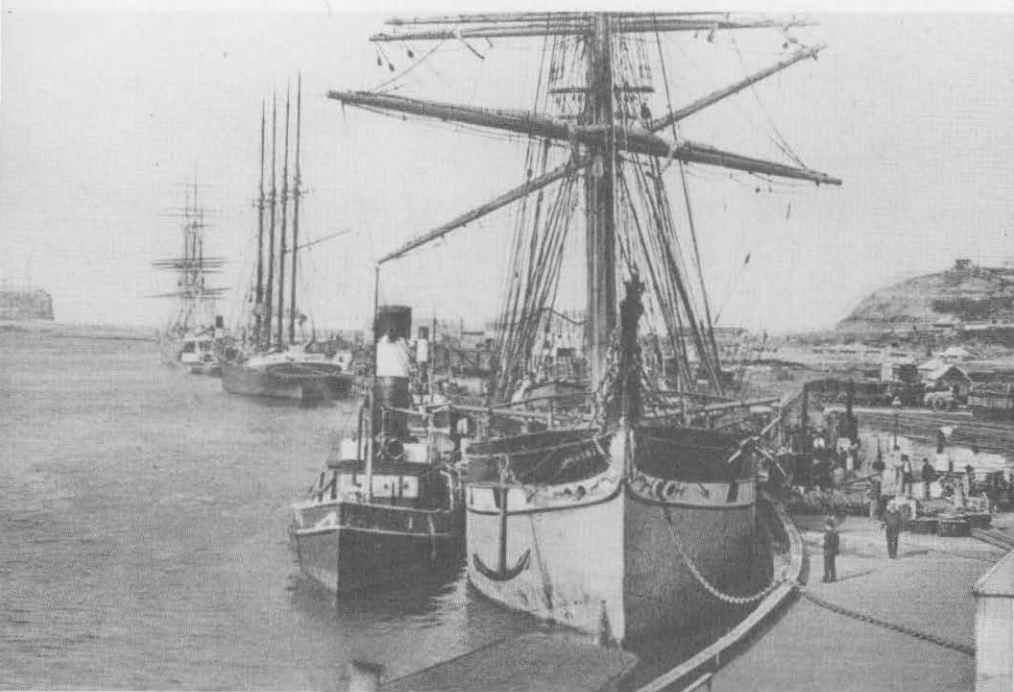
Typical worker's house, Wickham.
(Fred Gregory Collection)



'I haunted the School of Arts, still with an idea of learning before it was too late.'
Henry Lawson, *A Fragment of Autobiography*.

Wickham Mechanics' Institute.

(Jack Sullivan Collection)



'Harry's favourite pastime was to walk along the river bank or out to Nobby's lighthouse to watch the ships.'

Bertha Lawson, *My Henry Lawson*.

Newcastle Harbour.

(Newcastle Region Public Library Collection)

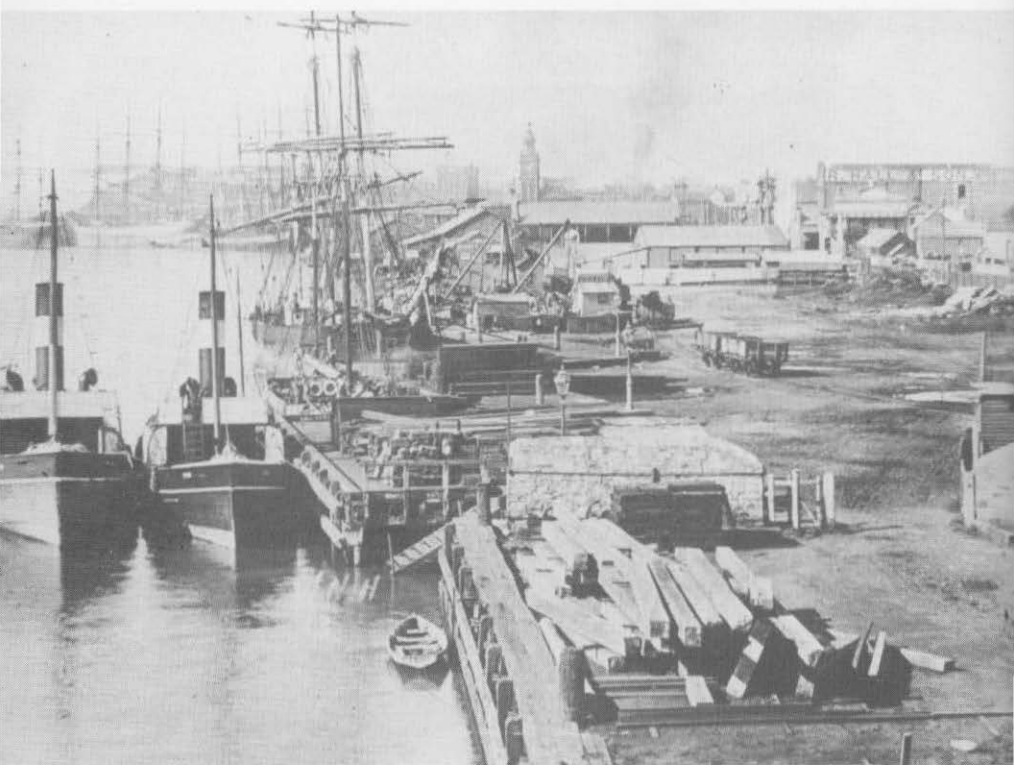


'I often think that it was the sight of that crowded, busy harbour and seeing the ships sailing, that aroused his wanderer's blood, and set him a-roving as he did later on.'

Bertha Lawson, *My Henry Lawson*.

The port of Newcastle.

(Newcastle Region Public Library Collection)



The foreshores at Newcastle, adjacent to Hudson Brothers' works.
(Newcastle Region Public Library Collection)

Rae S. Richards

SCENES FROM THE NEWCASTLE QUAY



'Every day ships sailed and others came in. Mainly they took the coal to South America – Callao and Valparaiso. Steamers, both coastal and deep-sea ships, called too, to get bunker coal.'

Bertha Lawson, *My Henry Lawson*.

Southern breakwater, Newcastle.

(Newcastle Region Public Library Collection)



The Bank Corner, Wickham, shortly after Lawson's period in Newcastle.
(Newcastle Region Public Library Collection)

Rae S. Richards

SCENES FROM 'THE NEWCASTLE QUILT'



Sunbakers. Newcastle Beach.



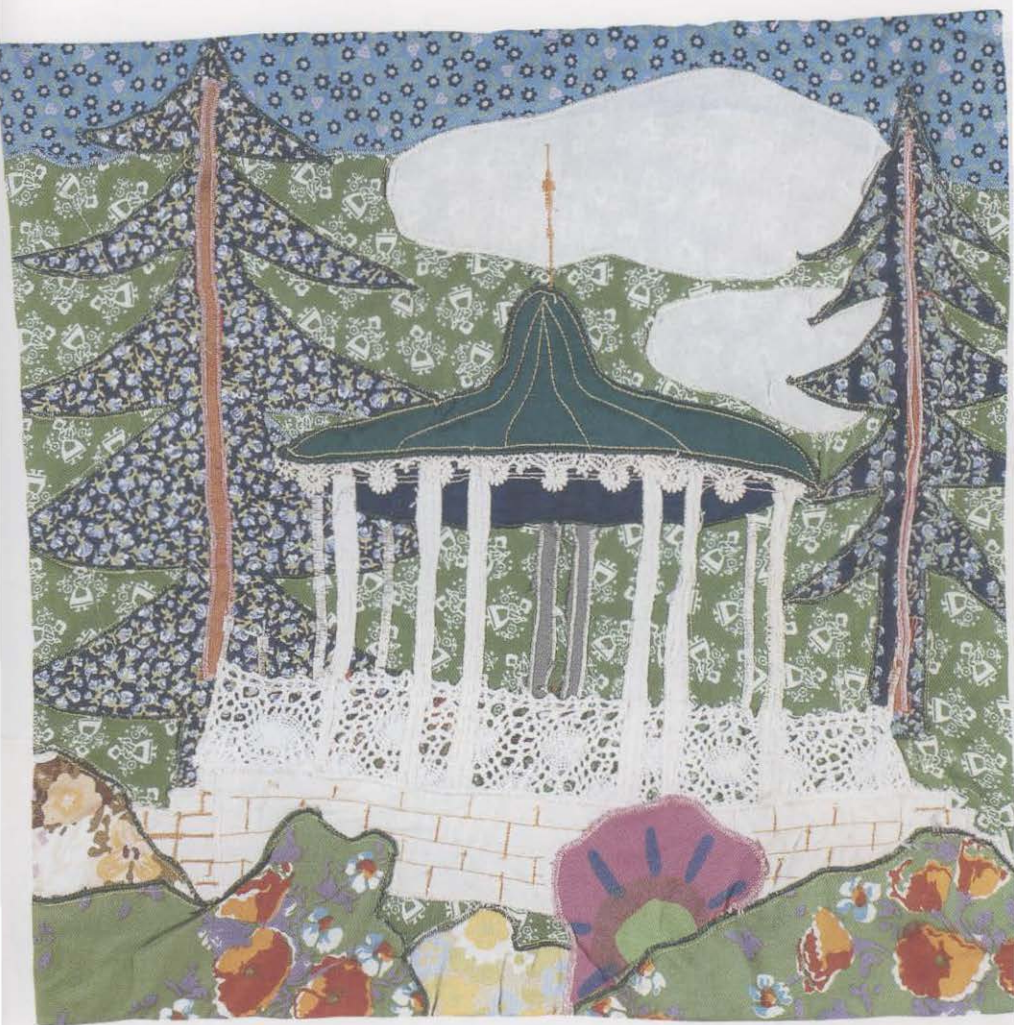
House on the Hill, Newcastle.



Newcastle Cathedral.



Street in Cooks Hill, Newcastle.



Band Rotunda, King Edward Park, Newcastle.



Newcastle East Public School and the Shot Tower.

Paul Kavanagh



Near Beach, Newcastle.



Nobby's. In White Island and the Blue Trench

Paul Kavanagh

FROGS

(for Dermot)

If I could give you an animal sign
it would be the frog,
for you do not flick over the surface of life
like a water-boatman or even a duck,
but plunge into the glassy element
and swim deep, at home.

But of course

a frog is as happy on land, his liquid leaps
find him in the air, fingers spread
for the next pearl-juggling lily pad;
then, as they sing into the night
I am reminded of your long singing into darkness
to bring on that most wanted dark of sleep.

They have their music too, a political brkxxx,
witty, contentious, individual,
which brings me round to my first thought,
that you share in both gravity and levity,
your fingers finding on the strings
the major-minor of your spirit's song.

In China they catch frogs as you do,
those slippery fists of squirming energy,
but you love to see the springs of their escape –
here I see them in the market place
earth-brown or striped bronze-green and white
set out in little rows and still alive
their hamstrings held with wire, the skin
torn with metre leaps to ideal ponds.

So that's China –

but in the water brews another generation
with bubble eyes and swift elastic grace;
soon day and night will rattle
with rival versions of an old folk song –

I heard a woman singing
you would have loved it,
the frogs kept up their washboard bass
long after she had walked into the dark.

TORTOISE

I bought a tortoise in Hangzhou
at Yellow Dragon Well,
where the head of the rainbow is impaled.

I got it at a little stall,
unable to bring myself to leave the place,
still from the sound of opera.

'Budong?' they said, not understand?
'Budong,' I said. The old musician smiled.

Then I saw this tortoise under a glass case,
not as long as my thumb, but broader,

not a real one you understand
with a ragged mossy skirt under its shell,
but one carved in mirror-polished stone.

I brought him home in my pocket
afraid that his head stretched out,
the folds of neck, would break.

Then missing something all night
I had no right to miss,
I realised he was gone.

I turned on lights, pulled drawers,
searched cold under tables, despaired,
and lay awake into the grey light.

He had fallen out of existence,
or had someone so fallen in love with him
they'd palmed him before they knew.

I remembered then the other tortoise –
being a boy I had picked him up
as he stepped out across the road.

His shell was green with algae
and moss hung from the edge.
His eyes lidded with sudden knowledge.

His folded neck came out
to look around from his full height,
changing his balance in my hand.

I took him home
and in a dish I poured a pond
and made a box his scrabbled world.

And slowly learned the scales of skin
the pads of feet on palms,
the smooth plates of bone.

When I realised he was gone
on subtle points, a heavy dancer,
I searched and walked the block,

but knew he'd slid into some pond
where after forty years he moves prodigious waves.

So the other joined him,
with a flick of his tail, in the dead of night.

He's moving now in my window pool,
his shell tagged with threads of weed.

I meant him for my son, so there's a loss;
he probably fell into the shards of words
where if I'm lucky he'll be found

by fingers running round the edge of shell
and enough love to make him walk.

Mattara



FESTIVAL OF NEWCASTLE
30TH AUGUST - 7TH SEPTEMBER

Poster for Mattera Festival. Artist: Geoff Nance

Russell McDougall

COAL RIVER ON A SUNDAY

In 1797, when Lieutenant John Shortland sailed into the unknown waters of what is now Newcastle Harbour, he discovered 'a very fine coal river' – and, although the official name of the settlement that grew up in the 'valley about a quarter of a mile from the harbour entrance' was Newcastle, it became known as Coal River (also for a time King's Town). The reasons for settlement were coal and convicts. In the early 1800s Newcastle rivalled notorious Norfolk Island as a place of 'secondary' punishment, that is as a prison location for the worst convicts from Sydney, who, having given too much trouble there, were sent north to work in the mines – from dawn to dusk, with one break for a meagre meal.

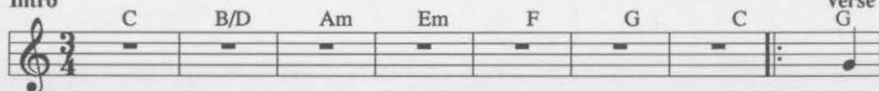
Nobbys (on the cover of this issue) was not then joined to the mainland. As Coal Island, it was a place of confinement for 'tertiary' offenders. The breakwater wall that now bridges the gap was a later product of convict labour.

The present composition was the 1987 winner of the Traditional Bush Ballad Award in the Song-Writing Competition of the Henry Lawson Festival held at Grenfell, New South Wales. The musical text has been specially prepared for this 'Newcastle' issue of *Kunapipi*; the composer is indebted to Lindsay Rowlands and Mark Brown (Department of Music, University of New England) for their assistance.

Coal River on a Sunday

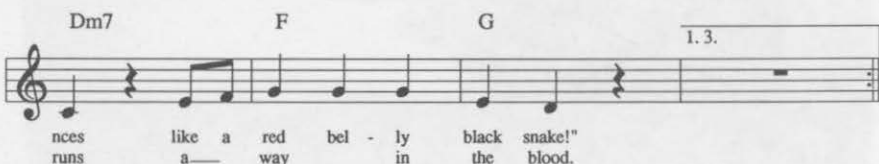
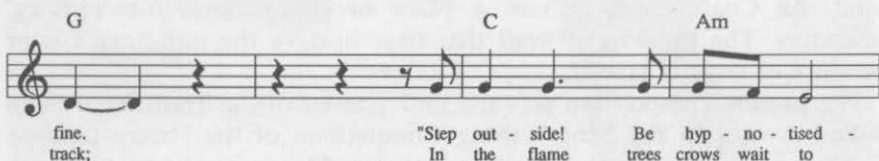
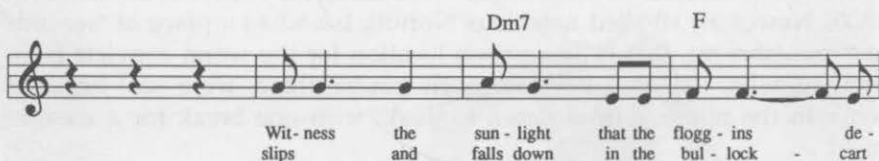
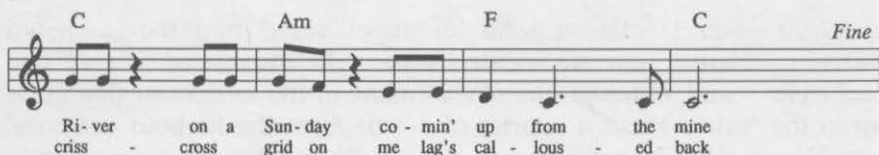
Words and Music by
RUSSELL McDOUGALL

Intro



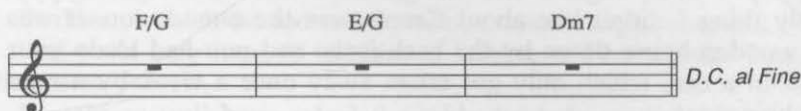
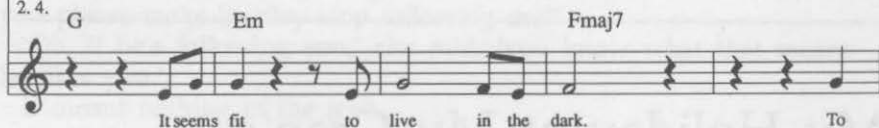
Verse

1. Coal
2. The



Chorus

2. 4.



3. Me father's a miner in a north country town -
His eyes are with me in the deep underground;
Me mother was Irish; she lived for religion -
God granted me the wings of a homing pigeon!

Instrumental Interlude:

Em | Em | Fmaj7 | Fmaj7 |

G | F/G | E/G | E/G | G7 | 3 times

4. The triangle undermines faith in the cross,
when there's nothing to marvel at but your own loss,
when the claws of the cat have scraped flesh from the bone
and into the cuts the salt has been sown.

Just let me back into the dark.

I'll slave and I'll carry the spark;

I don't care.

Coal River, on a Sunday, comin up from the mine.

My Holiday at My Gran's

My name is Annie and when I was eleven I went to my Gran's for a holiday. I packed my own bags and caught the train by myself to the country town where she lived in a big house with verandahs all around.

I loved my Gran very much. She never fussed, and she'd cook meringue pies every night if she thought that would make you happy. The only thing I didn't like about Gran's was the outside loo. It was a little wooden house down by the back fence and you had to do your business in a can, which only got taken away once a week by a man with a horse-cart.

Gran kept the toilet very clean. She scrubbed the wooden seat with Phenol and hosed down the floor. But it still smelt, and when there were extra people in the house, like there were on these holidays, the can filled up very quickly and you always worried about being *splashed* when you did anything.

And on these particular holidays, there was cousin Stanley to put up with as well. He'd always been an obnoxious child, but now that he was going to school, he was ten times worse. He haunted the toilet; you couldn't go without him noticing and following you.

He'd spy on me through my bedroom window too, and once I caught him going through my suitcase. He thought it terribly funny, knowing what colour bloomers I wore. He was the type of little boy who stuck pins in flies so he could sit and watch them wiggle.

And the reason he kept on doing these things was because no one stopped him.

His mother, my Aunt Jeanie, dressed him in miniature suits and called him her precious little man. In her eyes he could do nothing wrong. But then she wore silly hats with tiny net veils draped in front of her eyes and I'm sure they interfered with her eye sight.

Stanley's father, my Uncle Horrie, puffed a pipe and was always surrounded by a smoke haze, and he called Stanley his 'great big boy,' when really the child was quite undersized.

At least Stanley's twin sisters, Bernice and Monica, knew what he was really like. They told him to his face he was a nasty, ugly little gnome. And he was!

After a week of trying to ignore him, I finally asked Gran, 'Could you please make Stanley stop following me?'

'Oh, if he's following you,' she said, 'you know what that means - he likes you.'

It meant nothing of the sort.

'He follows me to the toilet even,' I was forced to tell her.

'All little boys do that sort of thing,' she said. 'You shouldn't let it worry you.'

'But he sits outside and listens,' I said.

Actually, he did worse. When I'd come out, he'd dart inside and look in the pan. Then he'd race off and tell Bernice and Monica what I'd done.

'He listens to you too, Gran,' I said and I'm sure she thought I was making it up.

'It doesn't do to be too touchy about these things,' she said.

'But *you'd* only have to tell him to behave and he would,' I said. 'He listens to *you*.'

I might as well have asked the table for help, or the rolling-pin she was using to roll out biscuits for afternoon tea.

'He'll only be here for another week,' she said. 'Surely you can put up with him till then?'

It seemed I would have to.

'Here comes rain-hail-or-shine! Rain-hail-or-shine!' Stanley's squawking little voice chanted from the verandah, and Gran said, 'Oh, if that's Hale, ask him has he had any lunch yet, there's a good girl.'

Like a *good girl* I did as I was asked. If only Gran had done the same.

Hale was at the bottom of the verandah steps when I came out. He was a boy from down the street and he came every other day to do jobs for Gran - chop wood or work in the garden - in return for which she gave him his lunch and two shillings a week.

He was about thirteen and wore knickerbockers that gaped at the knees because the buttons were always missing. Bernice and Monica thought him too young and too short for them to be interested in. Now that they were fourteen, and allowed to wear long skirts on Sundays, they thought themselves very grown-up, and preferred making eyes at the postman.

'Hale's just a child,' they'd say and I know they thought the same about me. On previous holidays I'd had marvellous fun with the girls, but this time, we hadn't played together once, not even the piano.

I wasn't especially friendly with Hale. He was a quiet boy, and he came to work, so we never talked much, but I liked him. He had a nice voice, husky like someone with a cold, and I thought it very manly.

And he hadn't had his lunch that day.

'Me Mum's still in bed,' he said.

'Still feeling poorly, is she?' Gran called from the kitchen.

'Yes, Mrs Ross!' he answered.

'Well, you'd better get this into you, then,' she said and gave me a tin plate with his lunch on it. It was the same lunch as we'd had: roast chicken, potatoes and peas, and she'd kept it warm on the back of the stove for him. She would load him up with biscuits too, before he went home. She was very generous like that.

But it never once occurred to her to let him eat his charity lunch in the kitchen instead of on the back verandah in front of everyone - Aunt Jeanie, Uncle Horrie, us girls and snake-eyed little Stanley.

While Hale sat on a fruit box, balancing his plate on his knees, Stanley stood in the middle of the verandah, with his legs braced wide apart in baggy shorts, and he watched every morsel that Hale raised to his mouth.

Hale glanced at the child now and then, but with no expression on his face to show whether he bothered him or not. But he must have! He would have bothered me, and I didn't have missing buttons or a pudding-basin haircut.

Every time Hale swallowed, and his adam's apple went up and down, Stanley would *gulp*. Then he'd stare intently, waiting for him to do it again.

Aunt Jeanie was there, lounging in a wicker chair, still wearing the same pretty frock she'd worn to church that morning. Uncle Horrie stood in a haze of pipe-smoke. The twins had their heads together, whispering. And no one said a word.

So I did.

I said quietly, 'Stanley, it's bad manners to stare,' and he turned on me and glared. Aunt Jeanie's far-away gaze hurried in from the garden and settled on me too. The twins held poses like they were having their picture taken, and Uncle Horrie coughed, clearing the smoke from in front of his face for a second. They all looked at me.

Then Aunt Jeanie laughed in a careless way like a cockatoo and went back to watching the irises and geraniums grow. The twins resumed their chatter, Uncle Horrie started puffing once more, and Stanley grinned, and began to wiggle and sing in his squeaky voice, 'Annie's got a sweetheart. Annie's sweet on Hale.'

I sat rigid, with my fists clenched. Hale went on eating, leaning over his plate, pushing potatoes and meat into his mouth and chewing fast. By speaking out, I'd only drawn attention to the fact that he was being stared at and I thought: he must hate me now.

To keep my eyes from watering, I fixed my gaze on the out-house down by the back fence, and pictured myself raising Stanley by the heels and dunking him in the pan, head first, again and again until my arms ached and he'd learned his lesson. The hideous little beast! It wasn't right that he should be awful to people and get away with it.

If Gran had been there, she might have agreed with me, but she came out when it was all over and settled into her favourite chair.

However, Hale said, in his quiet, manly way, 'I think I'll get them weeds out from round the dunny today, Mrs Ross,' and I realised he'd been staring at the out-house too.

'Whatever you think needs doing,' Gran said.

Hale finished his lunch and got up, and placed his plate on the verandah rail next to me, saying, 'Thanks Annie.' He nodded slightly to me while pulling his cap on his head. 'Thanks very much.'

I kept my hands clasped together in my lap and answered, 'You're welcome.'

Hale wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and went off into the garden, and Stanley started strolling around the verandah, parroting, 'You're welcome! You're welcome!' He snatched the serviette from beside his mother's tea cup and made a big display of wiping his mouth with it. And Aunt Jeanie smiled. *Her* little man knew bad manners when he saw them, *he* didn't need to be told. She sat up to blow him a kiss and he squawked, 'You're welcome!'

Bernice and Monica laughed and dashed off into the garden to titter behind the pear tree.

Aunt Jeanie lounged back again. 'Ah, to be young and carefree,' she sighed and closed her eyes.

I counted off the seconds in my head, promising myself I could leave the verandah when the *next* minute was up. And the next. I out-waited Stanley. He finally clamped down the steps and poked around among the pot plants. I waited a minute more, then left too and strolled along the pathway, towards the pear tree.

'Would anyone like to play skips?' I asked the girls. I thought *they'd* be on my side at least.

'Not today, Annie,' Bernice answered, and Monica found a pleat in her skirt that needed re-arranging.

I was on my own - like I had been all holidays. I walked further down the path, and as I approached little Stanley he made a pretence of blowing his nose, then thrust out his handkerchief towards me. In the centre was a glob of baby snails, crushed and still writhing.

I ran down, quite blindly, past the lemon tree in flower and snatched off a handful of blossoms so I could hold them to my face. And some

rose petals too, and a head of lavender, until all the smells together made me feel ill and I threw the lot away.

I bobbed down among the cabbages and searched for dew drops among the leaves. But Stanley was impossible to block out. I saw him dart over to Bernice and Monica, and whisper something to them, something that made them crane their heads away like a couple of white geese. They told him to *shoo*!

It was easy for *them* to ignore him, they were his sisters and there were two of them. Hale and I were quite on our own.

That's why we banded together the way we did, I think. We had to. And we had to do *something* because nobody else would do it for us.

Having shared the joke about me with his sisters, Stanley skipped down the path to tell *me* now why I was so ridiculous.

'Annie's looking for babies under the cabbages!' he sang as he jaunted past. Then, when he reached the toilet he added for Hale to hear, 'Annie's looking for *Hale's* babies under the cabbage leaves!'

He ducked inside, slammed the door, and went into his act of bouncing on the seat, making it clang against the can, and giving little shrieks, pretending he'd fallen in.

We'd all heard him do this before so I was surprised to see Hale stand up and lean towards the out-house, frowning.

Then he said to me quite loudly across the cabbages, 'Annie, do you think Stanley might have fallen in?'

His husky voice was so thoroughly convincing, for a moment I was fooled. Even Stanley chuckled from inside the toilet. Of course he hadn't fallen in. But Hale's gaze remained steady and I finally understood and scrambled to my feet.

'Hale and I think Stanley might have fallen in,' I called to the people on the verandah. I had no idea what Hale had in mind, but I knew he wanted me to do this.

Aunt Jeanie sat up. 'What is it, Horrie?'

Hale raised his voice. 'It's your little boy. I think he might have fallen in,' and he inclined his head towards the out-house again.

Uncle Horrie gripped the rail. 'Well, don't stand there like a fool boy, get him out! You're the closest!'

Hale dropped his garden fork, stepped round to the door and reached for the latch. They'd told him he could.

I remember seeing little Stanley's face when the door swung in. His mouth fell open and his eyes went so wide they flowed almost white in the dark. He leaned back as Hale advanced on him, and he did slip a little way down through the hole in the seat. Then, of course, he went a lot further down as Hale's hands came down on his shoulders.

I wasn't worried, I knew Hale wouldn't do anything awful. He was a strong boy and he was not about to let the child fall in all the way. But Stanley didn't know that and he let out a trembling squeal.

Having given him one good dunking, and one small dose of terror, Hale pulled him up again and backed out the door with him. He held him at arm's length by the shoulders of his coat and the child kicked and wriggled to get away, squirming like something pinned.

'Put me down!' he demanded.

Hale placed him on the path and stepped away. Stanley stood on his own, naked from his navel to the tops of his shoes, with brown mucky stuff running off his bottom and down the backs of his legs. He shivered, partly in terror, and partly in rage, I think. No sound came out of him.

Bernice and Monica came at a gallop with their skirts hitched high, and I ran too. Hale had done his part, now he looked to me. Now it was my turn.

I didn't laugh out loud. That would have been too callous. Anyway, Stanley had taught us a better way to do it. I held my hand in front of my mouth and shook my shoulders up and down, just slightly.

'He did it!' Stanley squealed. 'Hale did it! Hale pushed me!'

Little fibber! I was ready to say, but Aunt Jeanie arrived and started scolding, 'Don't be so silly! Hale got you out! Look what you've done to yourself!' She waved her hands at him as if warding him off. 'Horrie, do something!'

'Of course, dear,' Uncle Horrie said, took his pipe from his mouth and that was all.

Bernice and Monica kept looking at Stanley and looking away again, *peaking* at him.

'Go away!' Aunt Jeanie told them, and she told Stanley, 'For goodness' sake, cover yourself!'

His face went scarlet and he tried to run, and tripped on his shorts, and fell face down on the path, baring his mucky little bottom to the world.

Then Gran arrived. 'Give him here,' she said and pulled him to his feet. With her big, busy hands she peeled off his clothes, exposing his little hunched shoulders, his red neck and his tiny pink heels. He wriggled and squealed and cried out his protests, but she stripped him bare and marched him off to the sink at the back steps, where she hosed him down like a dog that had rolled in something nasty.

He stamped his little feet and screamed and wailed under the cold spray while we all watched, Hale included, still back on the path with his arms hanging heavy at his sides.

When Gran finally wrapped Stanley in her apron and carried him inside, he was sobbing. And I glanced again in Hales's direction, but he was gone.

Aunt Jeanie had Stanley out on the verandah again, that afternoon, in another miniature suit, but he was a much quieter little man this time. He kept his head buried in her lap, and when he did peek from the folds of her dress, his face was puckered and his eyes were red from crying and red with hate too.

I tried to talk to Gran about it.

'I shouldn't have laughed at Stanley,' I said.

'Oh! a bit of laughter never hurt anyone,' she answered, going *plonk! plonk!* with the biscuit cutter along a spread of ginger-bread dough.

'But he must have felt awful,' I said.

'Little boys aren't bothered by those things,' she answered, going *plonk! plonk! plonk!* cutting out row after row of ginger biscuits, all the same. 'What a funny little thing you are,' she chuckled, 'the things you think to worry about.'

And every second day, the rest of the time I was there, she'd stand out on the back verandah and ask, 'Now where do you s'pose Hale has got to?' She never knew why he didn't come back.

A slightly different version of this story is to be published in the 1991 Australian Children's Book Council Anthology *Into the Future*.

Christopher Pollnitz

MOVING

Cranking their ropes like treble
clefs my daughter and her friend come
skipping across the school oval,
squealing with too much excitement
about seeing the new house to hear
they can come and see it.

Five minutes
they'll be through the split-levels and up
beyond the garden where, two trees in,
you're into the bush – the both of them
too excited to notice the whipbirds'
'liquid lashes' as Roland put it,
or how at nightfall insects
invade the rooms with their leggy
self-absorbed and delighted descant.

'AFTER TWO THOUSAND YEARS . . .'

The afternoon that the Iraqis Scudded
their cannisters (or did they?) into Haifa
the churning of the pest controller's motor
blended with the radio as he un-
-reeled his hose through the front door,
gas throbbing over my threshold. No white ants
and the little garnet bush-roaches should be kept
down. He reeled up and drove off
leaving gas instead of roaches in the air.
Even on Armageddon eve, you have to
get on with it, I guess, if you don't get on with
six-legged monsters; it is, as they say,
them or us and the smell that lingers
in the dirt under the house ineradicably.

Charles Jordan

BATHS

Tony, who's a little retarded,
swims his fifty metres.
In his goggles and his nob hangers.
He's off course and crashing into things.
From the grandstand we giggle,
but our guilt stings,
like chlorine in our eyes that evening.

Frank, the cranky inspector,
hoses the steamy pavement.
His glasses are foggy
and his slimy brown belly,
shines in the damp evening air.
But in spite of our mischief,
he shares his hot chips with us,
he is one of the best blokes here.

Two girls, we can sometimes talk to,
are here again this evening.
One in a bikini,
her smooth white body,
shivers in the evening breeze.
I boast that I kissed her . . . underwater,
and that's why my friends didn't see me.
They don't believe me.

From the highest tower, beyond the water,
I can see the girls we were talking to.
But they're not even looking,
so there's no way I'm jumping –
then they close the towers and I have to.
It's lonely at the top.
The wind blows around me. The lights are on
but a second too late, I've already gone,
plummeting into obscurity.

BOY ON A BEACH

Some afternoons he and his father went fishing
They never caught anything
His father had bought the rods two years ago
And didn't know anything about fishing
So it was probably just as well.

It was an embarrassing thought,
An angry great cat fish –
rolling and swishing from side to side
While his father kept missing it with the knife
They usually gave up after an hour or two
And had a swim
Then walked back along the beach.

His mother and sisters came on holiday too
He was always lonely.
His sisters were friends with the girls –
in the next caravan
He wouldn't play with them.

Last Christmas they tried to pull his clothes off
But he got away, and ran off into the dunes
They'd been smoking pot.
His father drank beer with their father
Their mothers talked.

One day he went for a walk
further than he'd ever gone before
Past the pinballs,
and the milkbar with the sandy floor.

To beyond the headland.
Where flabby women like beached whales –
bathed nude
And the men just walked around,
He looked for a second
And then to the ground.

Soon he was all alone

His shadow made a dark path down to the water

He undressed and went in

He did backward somersaults, over and over again

And imagined a pretty mermaid his own age,

She swam with him.

LIZARD IN THE LOVE LETTER

Between the delicate

folds of my paper

There hides

a little stowaway

Nestled together

in a dark innocence

We're stamped,

and posted away

Traveling companions,

our fate's sealed together.

We'll soon be discovered,

The truth

hovers over us

like a guillotine

If only it would

fall

and free us

from each other.

BRAYE PARK
A View of Newcastle

There's a reservoir
but nowhere for a drink of water
and not even a tree
if you need to go to the toilet.

It's never been a popular picnic spot
in spite of the barbecues and the view.
People come up here to get stoned
and to screw.

You can see a lot from here:
you can see the whole city
except in summertime, for the blinding glare.
then you can see no further than
your own squinting eyelids –
but you know it's there.

In wintertime
when you can see the city
it's like viewing your own dead body,
cold and grey. The wind sweeps down
laying a shroud of cloud
and carries your soul away –

Well, it would
if anyone came up here
on a chilly day.

A Gentle Consummation

Kathleen stands on the verandah and looks out. It is after four and the cars come one after another, turning from Maitland Road and moving past her house in an endless stream. She can feel their vibration as she leans against the doorway. Now they have stopped. The gates will be down at Clyde Street. She can see the impatience on the faces, the irritation as the cars bank up. All those men going home, tired after work, needing to be cosseted and fed. She wishes she could put her arms around them all to give them comfort. The cars begin to move. She can see their relief – their anxiousness to be home.

She swings herself round and walks her slow way, up over the step and along the hall, through the dark lounge room into the kitchen. The nights are closing in, May already, and the shortest day only a month away.

Even here as she sits and drinks her tea, she can feel the cars going by. She remembers the bicycles – masses of them from The B.H.P. A few of them still about, but who would ride a bicycle if they could drive a car? She would have had a car if somebody had encouraged her. A special car of course. She would have driven in all the traffic. She had no fear. No fear at least if she was in control. She had been frightened with Brigid near the end. And with Jozef who could not hold a paintbrush without dripping paint or wash the dishes without wetting his shoes. Dear Jozef, so ready to help and so helpless. Yet strong. She remembers his anger with Brigid when she had given his socks to St. Vincent de Paul. 'I will organize my own works of charity,' he had said to her, so lordly and dignified. It still cuts like a knife in her heart that she has lost him.

If only Father Brendan were here to listen to her doubts, to hear why she cannot accept any more without question. As a young woman, she had said to him what she could not say to her mother, her brother or sisters. Not at confession. She needed to see his eyes as she told him. 'Why has He given me so much to bear?' And though she had refused to go to church, that dear man had continued to come. They had talked and they had argued. 'If you had been a man Kathleen,' he said to her, 'we would have made a priest of you.' Oh, she would kiss his feet if he were here now.

She makes her way to the back doorway. The grass is untidy, the chrysanthemums finished, the frangipani losing its leaves. In a little while its limbs will be grey and bare – unlike a living tree. The place depresses her with the traffic, the grit from The Works, and the houses so flat and dingy.

When Brigid came home after her retirement, Kathleen tried to persuade her 'A nice brick house in Mayfield on the hill near the Monastery so we can hear the Angelus.' But Brigid who had always been the faithful one, had no time now for prayer bells. In her room next to the lounge with its cedar sideboard, she began drinking herself to death. Once again Kathleen had to take charge humouring her sister, trying to bring help and finally having to make all the arrangements. Again she was left alone and who would offer comfort when she was dying?

Her lot has been to watch the world go by. She stood on the edge of life when she had the spirit to be a priest or a doctor or a foreign missionary. Father Brendan had seen it but he was long dead. And Jozef whom she loved was lost to her – twice lost to her. That made the world even harder to bear.

She closes the door, locks it and walks back to the front. She hates this barring of gates – this imprisonment. And just to put two eggs in the saucepan and set the table, makes her whole body ache. When she thinks how easily she used to cook the roast each Sunday – beef one week and lamb the next, with potatoes, pumpkin, two greens and her special sauce made with orange juice and fresh mint. Then baked apples and a bread and butter custard to use up the oven's heat. 'Could I take another helping?' Jozef would say in his shy way, and he would spoon up the spicy toffee from the apples and almost purr with delight.

Now as she sits looking into her cup, seeing the pattern of tea leaves, she knows that like belief, and the frangipani in winter, Jozef might easily have been put aside. For she can still remember she did not want him.

Oh, he wasn't like the Greeks who lived next door to her brother Danny in Camperdown and took advantage. No, he was fair. And neat – almost too neat in his old fashioned suit and small thick spectacles. She found herself impatient, wanting to hurry him along as he stiffly formed his English words in a timid high voice. He had come eight years ago from Poland. And though he did not go on to say it, she knew then he was Jewish. Her judgement told her to say no. She wasn't well enough and there were other places. But as he looked around, furtively taking in the kitchen, the bathroom, the compact yard, she caught his eyes behind his spectacles and saw that he had suffered. How then could she refuse him?

She was firm enough to say she could not give him lunch or dinner that day or on any day when the cafeteria was open. On Saturdays and Sundays she gave full board, though she was prepared to adjust the charge if he preferred to go to family or friends. 'In the weekend I will be here,' he said, 'but if I am to visit, I will give you early information.' Then he carried his small port into the bedroom and closed the door.

She could not explain her uneasiness with him. Danny was no talker, but when he stayed with her, he blundered round, knocking furniture and would even sing in a loud voice after he'd taken a little ale. And her last boarder Bill, would work in his room with the wireless blaring. But this one made no noise. After two hours of his silence, she had knocked at his door to ask if he would take some tea or coffee. 'Thank you, thank you,' he had said in his soft way. 'That is very kind. I would like a coffee.' And something in the gratefulness of his tone and his tentative smile made her do something she had done for no other boarder. She prepared the coffee as she did for special family occasions, boiling the milk, letting it rise and bubble, then adding it to the strong coffee till the brown and the white twined into a creamy caramel. The Polish man was overcome. 'You have made a most delicious coffee.' And later, when they had become very close to one another, he continued to hark back to her kindness and her coffee.

She was grateful for that impulse, because for a long time, he continued to puzzle her. He did not have the smell of a man on his body or his clothes. Even after a long day at the University, he would return unchanged – no sweat on his face or the underarms of his shirt – no grimy marks in the creases of his collar. He was fastidious about his work and would fill every portion of his paper with tiny, neat handwriting and fine geometric diagrams. In his room, the bed was made, his clothes were folded, his books were stacked and tidy. After he finished his washing, for she was responsible only for sheets and towels, he would take hours to hang out his clothes. She saw him one day, surveying the line and going back to change the pegs, making sure the distance was uniform between shirts and singlets and blousing underpants.

There was something other than manly in the way he held a cup, ate a biscuit or took out his small purse to pay his board. For she had learned to love the dark growth of beard called the five o'clock shadow, to admire the beads of sweat that gathered on the top of men's lips and to smell their difference.

On one unforgettable occasion, she had gone to visit a married friend and as they had sat together drinking tea, the three sons of the family came to visit. They were tall, broad shouldered young men with dark

beards and when their mother played the piano, they stood around her and joined in the song with deep bass voices. Kathleen had trembled at the weight of so much manhood.

What was this country across the sea that had made a man so unlike Australian men? She questioned why she had opened her house to such a foreigner. Then came the surprises – one after another and before she knew it, her life was bound up with his in a way she had never imagined.

He was in the habit of going out for a little time on Sunday. She thought it must be a meeting at the Synagogue – she'd been told there was one in Newcastle. One day when he returned, he said 'Father Patrick asks about your health Miss O'Malley.'

Even then she did not understand.

'At the Mass, the priest asks if you needed him to come to the house.'

'Then you are a Catholic,' she said to him. 'If I had known, I would have gone with you.'

That was enough. Next Sunday he had organized the taxi to come at a quarter to nine. Every week they would go and return together.

One day he brought her a small bottle of wine. 'For our Sunday dinner, Miss O'Malley. A wine from Portugal. It is light and dry. I'm sure you will enjoy it.'

She was amazed by the gift and his long speech. The meal next day was a banquet. Her head spun with the wine and the steaming dishes.

Then suddenly her widowed sister took ill and was rushed to the Mater. 'I must go to Agnes straight away,' Kathleen explained to him. 'Her daughter has a young family in Brisbane and her two sons are overseas.'

He insisted on going with her to the hospital and when they had found out the seriousness of the illness, he said. 'You must contact your brother and your sister Miss O'Malley. This is too big a responsibility for you alone.'

She could not make him understand that Danny was not able to face illness. He had not even come to visit their mother as she lay dying in the house so many months. And though Brigid was a nursing sister in Victoria, she worked now only with babies and could not bear to look on death. 'I am the small and broken one,' Kathleen explained. 'But I nursed our mother. I have a special gift for comforting the dying.'

She loved his presence with her at the hospital. And after Agnes' death, his support at the church and the funeral parlour. And she was warmed by his anger with the family because they had left all the arrangements to her. But it was no comfort after the funeral when Brigid decided she would take her vacation and stay a month. Brigid

was so bossy, wanting to re-organize the house and everyone in it, beginning with the painting of the kitchen. The paint had been delivered and they were about to make a start when Brigid decided suddenly she would have to go to Sydney. Jozef tried to help out but he didn't even know how to hold a brush so Kathleen decided to call in a tradesman. And in the midst of emptied dressers and piled up kitchen chairs, Brigid returned and began her winter collection for St. Vincent de Paul. No wonder Jozef had been so angry. Later, when Brigid had gone out, he said, 'Miss O'Malley, it worries me to see your sister make so much work for you.' But Kathleen wanted nothing more than the weeks to pass quickly, Brigid to leave and their lives to resume their old pattern.

For all the sumptuousness of their baked dinners together, it was the Sunday evening meal she treasured most. On one of these nights as she brought him the last of the pancakes and watched his precise and fussy movements as he sprinkled sugar and squeezed the lemon juice, she realized that for the first time in her life she was satisfied.

But there was more – almost too much for her to take. Somehow he had discovered her birthday. 'We will have a special outing,' he said to her. 'It is a play – no, a small opera at the Roxy Theatre.'

Not since her childhood was she so taken out of herself. The bright stage, the lavish costumes, the singing and especially the dancing. She felt herself swept away, moving with a freedom she had only known in dreams. Afterwards she thanked him but it was not enough. She wanted to go out to the frangipani tree where the flowers were lying heavy-scented on the grass and there, tall and regal in a flowing gown, she would take his hands, cast off his shyness and his faltering step and draw him into the grand twirling, one two three, one two three, of the waltz.

Then began another pattern. He would go to Sydney each Saturday on the morning Flyer and return at night by eight. He brought her a different gift each week – chocolates, flowers, a book, a small bottle of cologne. She enjoyed making the day pass quickly by baking little treats for the week that followed.

Suddenly, without warning, he said to her. 'Miss O'Malley. I must give you early information. I am leaving. You see, in three months I will be married.'

It was a blow to her head but she could not cry out; a knife in her heart but she could not bleed. And after pain more intense than any she had known, came numbness – her limbs cold and heavy, tingling at times with the sensation of pins and needles. She smiled and talked as he continued to bring her Saturday gifts but her face was a mask.

She cooked his Sunday meals and made his evening coffee, but her sap had ceased to flow.

Curiosity saved her – stretching out her mind, making her wonder what sort of woman he had found. For try as she could, it was impossible for her to imagine this timid smooth man in the steamy grip of passion. So when he asked if he might bring his fiancée to stay a night, she said yes, feeling the pain, but intrigued at the same time to see what this woman would be like.

Jozef has driven her from the station to the house. She also was a foreigner as might have been expected. Nor was she very young. But Kathleen could not deny she was tall and handsome, though she would probably go to fat like other foreign women. Kathleen could have accepted all this, along with the kiss she'd been given at the door, while Jozef stood by like a boy wanting her approval. But how could she approve? How could she swallow the insult that followed?

For when Jozef had gone to buy wine, the woman had given her a large parcel. Upright, tied with bright paper and caught like a cracker at the top. Kathleen felt flattered that she should have taken so much trouble. But when she had peeled off the cellophane and the tissue underneath, she saw a basket with high sides. And in the basket were groceries, plain ordinary groceries – a pack of tea, a jar of marmalade, butter, flour, sugar and several small tins of spaghetti and baked beans.

'But what are these?' She said to the woman, her voice already cold.

'Something for your pantry.'

'But why should you bring me groceries?'

'I thought to help.'

'I have made my preparations.'

'I wanted to save you extra trouble.'

'You have come as a guest to my house and you have brought me groceries. Perhaps they do this in your country. They do not do this in mine.'

'But Jozef tells me you do not go out often to shop because of your hip.'

This woman had insulted her household. Now she was being impertinent. 'Though you see me walk with a crutch, I have no need of what you have brought me, and I would be grateful if you would take the basket and the provisions with you when you return to Sydney tomorrow.'

So that was settled. No more cosy visits and though they asked her to come and see them when they had moved to Sydney, she refused. Jozef continued to ring. They would talk together, and she would enquire politely about his wife but it was clear that Kathleen wanted no closer contact.

But for Jozef she held no blame, no resentment. This woman had connived to have him and had thought by her insult to break the ties that had grown between them in their two years together.

Sometimes when she spoke to him on the phone she heard the noise from the children who were allowed to stay up late and were not kept in order by their mother. 'Perhaps I am too old for small children,' he would say wearily. Then she longed to have him with her - to let him sit quietly, concentrating on his fine writing and the detailed drawings that filled his pages. A thinking man, a Professor of Mathematics, needed to be left at peace with his books. She would never have interrupted. But an hour or two after the children were in bed and she had cleared away their playthings, she would measure out the milk into the saucepan and watching so that it did not boil over, would carefully begin to prepare the coffee.

E. Speers

SONNET 35

Oh, my Tubby Wubbins! Beautiful cat!
How did I get so lucky in this world
That it's my humble home in which you're curled,
Silvery tabby tom, so fine and fat.
Your pale green eyes are rimmed with kohl, or so
It seems. Your face is tigerish and square.
A mink, or a movie star, would love to wear
A coat like yours. You've blessed my life, you know.

Each night I hug you in my arms and say
Out loud exactly how superb you are,
Before I put you out. Don't go too far!
And come back right at dawn. I dread the day
When we must part, love of my life, and yet
How poor I'd be if we had never met.

Ian Saw

THE MIME-ARTIST BECOMING A BLIND-MAN

The artist's nimble fingers glance
across the surface of the glass.
The images of frantic hands,
like water-spider's upside-down
reflections, ape their frenzied dance.

Then pause –
and touching, cold as clay,
the mirrored features of his face;
they seem to mould its disarray
and change the contours and the shape.
The living folds of flesh obey
and duplicate the formless mask
a caged imagination makes.

Content, he smiles and turns away.
The fluttering fingers seem to clasp
a makeshift likeness to his heart.

IT'S HER MOTION

I think
 moves me most
it is eye-catching
and I
watch her in Hyde Park.

If it were not
for the way she moves
she would be just any

girl
in tattered jeans
rather grubby
really

but she is very
nearly
perfect in her movement
poise
grace

as she walks
the highwire
path
balanced
perfectly.
She has a rather...
ordinary

face
it is an urchin's
and her hair
is straight
short
unruly.

Somehow
it does not seem unusual
that she should have
a blue cattle-dog
scouting her flank
he is grinning hugely
foot-long tongue
red
lank
lapping
the winter-green
grass
he is completely
out
of joint
merely a pup
he is a lolloper.

She turns
suddenly
swivels
from the hips

points
to something
is gone
calling
into the sun.

If I could only capture her
like that...

drawn in
to the morning's vortex
and the flurry of gulls.

DEATH OF GINGER MEGGS

News Item: The victim of yesterday's fatal rail accident at Rockdale has been identified as an actor, aged 17. He received wide recognition several years ago for playing the title-role of Ginger Meggs in the popular film.

He was...

What if
Ginger Meggs
found that life
wasn't really like that?

Like what?

All sun
and no rain
perhaps
what if
he found that the bullies
always
get the better
of the battlers?

He didn't know that?

What if
he woke up
roped to a mortgage
and found Tiger Kelly
owned the bank?

Ain't it a fact!

What if
he just couldn't hack
the pressure anymore
all those black eyes
just to make us laugh
and jumped under a train?

He'd go splat?

What if
his flesh smashed
and his bones
clattered and cracked
and he dropped to the track
four carriages back
before the train pulled up?

That's a bit rough.

What if
the shop-girl with the legs
kept on eating her fish
and chips
and the Fat Man said

if he had any consideration
he'd have done it
at the station
so we wouldn't get held up
this close to Xmas.

That's life

I guess.

EVERY CHILD KNOWS ONE

Every child knows one
who will step out from behind a bus
and disappear as strangely
as the space left by a stone
entering water.

I knew such a one:
she came every day from Tatura
with a grubby face
and I liked her
not knowing she was cherubic
as I do now.
Not understanding
the explanation
the water
the stone
the empty space.

Only feeling
the chill of the blue air
that rushed into the vacuum of her place.

From Linear to Areal: Suggestions Towards a Comparative Literary Geography of Canada and Australia

Geography has been for too long a hidden dimension of literary studies, compared to history. This is all the more surprising since historians have long seen the two as complementary: geography is the other side of history as space is the other side of time. Especially the work of the French *Annals* school of history springs to mind: Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie are cultural geographers as much as historians. And it is thought-provoking that while literary scholars have feared to tread on geographical ground, scared perhaps that it would give way to Montesquieu's theory of climatic zones, National Romanticism, or even *Blut und Boden*, it is a materialist historian like Braudel who is left to complain that 'we have museum catalogues, but no artistic atlases').¹

Lately, however, this disregard of the geographical dimension has been changing. As part of the increasing environmental awareness of the 60s, 70s and 80s, geographers have become interested in how human beings through the ages have felt about their environment, and imaginative literature has become a prime source mined by historical and phenomenological geographers. There has been a growing body of 'literature' and even suggestions of a journal in the field.²

But perhaps an even more important impetus to taking geography seriously has come from 'the new literatures' in European languages, of which I am going to offer some suggestions towards a comparison of Anglo-Canadian and Anglo-Australian literary geography. In Canadian and Australian literature geography has been practically unavoidable, in both colonial and post-colonial phases of culture. Length of settlement and complexities of social development have not obscured the ways in which geographical conditions determine or are changed by the arrival of an imported culture. Transplanted literary cultures have been confronted by an alien natural environment and already established native cultures, and a main preoccupation of culture and literature has

been the process of 'coming to terms', of learning to depict and describe, even to see the 'new world' that comes into being in this confrontation. This is perfectly illustrated by the history of painting in Canada, particularly the Arctic, and perhaps especially in Australia, where this problem of learning to see has produced what is no doubt still the continent's finest scholarly achievement, Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific*.

Post-colonies settled on continental land-masses may by their very nature be conducive to the development of a strong national literary-geographical consciousness. The U.S. version of this we know only too well: the Frontier, the great westward movement of Manifest Destiny; Emerson speaking of the need for a new kind of poetic mind to fill America's 'ample geography' – and along comes Whitman! The Canadian and Australian versions of continental conquests – if such they be – vary from the American in many ways, just as they vary from each other. In the following I will be making a number of probably untenable generalizations based largely on a detailed reading of Rudy Wiebe's *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic* compared in passing to Les Murray's *The Australian Year* (this is in absence of any truly comparable work about Australia, except perhaps Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines*, but that was written by a Pom!). I will be looking mainly at the conceptualization of Canada and Australia, their configurations in the writers' mental maps and imagined geographies, and though I think these may be at their clearest (and most conscious perhaps) in works of non-fiction, I will be concluding with some remarks about the 'geografictione' of Aritha van Herk's very recent *Places Far From Ellesmere*.

I am of course not unaware that theorists of post-colonial literature have made comparisons of Canadian and Australian literary geography. Diana Brydon's contributions are perhaps the best-known³. Russell McDougall's comparatist work, however, shows a greater literary sophistication, even playfulness, as in his comparisons of the line-lengths in the poetry of Les Murray and Robert Kroetsch in an article whose title says it all 'Sprawl and the Vertical'.⁴ There certainly seems to be some evidence for this generalization about the density of much Australian verse compared to the apparent transparency of much Canadian, which is perhaps more Dickinson than Whitman, to stay with that American comparison a little longer.

Finally, among the post-colonial theorists, it is Graham Huggan who perhaps most clearly states how geography, how the map has become an 'enabling structure' for post-modernist, post-colonial writing: a form in which the literary mind can open itself up instead of closing in on itself.⁵ Geography, I would suggest, is more than just a metaphor for

the psyche, the map is more than just a figure for the mind. In fact, I would argue that there is a mode of anti-psychological literature flourishing in Canada and Australia, where psychology becomes geography – or ecology as I have argued elsewhere.⁶ This is part, I think, of a modern rejection of the theory of the pathetic fallacy, of the mind as an absolute, some kind of Newtonian ether, or Descartes' and Milton's Satan's idea of the mind as 'its own place'. A modern understanding would tend to replace the dichotomy of inert matter vs. an ever-active intellect or psyche with something more relativistic and reflexive.

Rudy Wiebe's *Playing Dead* is a geographical meditation in three parts, three related essays, which both share a common structure and describe a development, a coming-to-terms. At the beginning of the first essay the speaking voice is in a plane looking down on his country spread out like a map below him; at the end of the last he is down *in* the landscape, experiencing it on foot. And this movement from outside to inside the landscape is mirrored in the process of contemplation set out in the titles of the essays: from consciously 'Exercising Reflection' on the meaning of the North for a Canadian to finding 'true North' 'In Your Own Head'. The crucial step in the reflective transformation here is finding the right terms for thinking about and living in the North – and the right terms for establishing a Canadian national identity, which has to be oriented to the North in Wiebe's view, if it is to avoid being just a lining up of all Canadians hand-in-hand on the border, facing South.

That border is invisible from the air, the aeroplane-borne eye at the opening of the book notes. It is a line drawn on a map – or rather a line measured in the heavens and projected onto earth: 'the big medicine line', the Plains Indians used to call it, because this was where the soldiers from either side would stop pursuit, inexplicably unless they were commanded by some great spiritual force. Past the Great Lakes Canada lacks definition from the south; we all know this. But Wiebe thinks it through – and even sows doubt about the apparently well-defined, sea-defined northern border. Not from the air, where 'the limits of Canada are clear and definite, even under ice', or from the beaches of the northernmost islands looking out across the Arctic ocean, which will next meet land in Siberia. But from the water it is hard to know where the ocean ends and the rivers begin. Seen from the water it makes less sense to conceive of rivers as running off from heights of land to vanish in the sea than 'to recognize that rivers are the gnarled fresh fingers of the sea reaching for the mountains'.⁷

To European exploration and imperial penetration land was the barrier, water the link until this century. The British especially came from the sea – and were sailors. But Canada was mapped and explored from the rivers, not from the sea – with the exception of the West Coast

charted first by James Cook on his third voyage eight years after he had discovered the way to circumnavigate Australia. And Cook summons up the crucial difference between the European discovery, mapping and subsequent imagining of the antipodes of my comparison. Australia proved circumnavigable, but impenetrable (the rivers kept disappearing as explorers moved inland); Canada was eminently penetrable along the rivers (if you travelled light enough), but uncircumnavigable. The Great South Land dwindled as Europeans got there and proved to be two continents but mainly sea, whereas Canada kept blocking the North West Passage to the Indies, kept proving itself to be land deceptively deeply 'bayed' and well-rivered.

In terms of its understanding of history Rudy Wiebe's book, as one would expect of a Westerner, is to some extent written against the Innis/Creighton thesis of 'the empire of the St. Lawrence' as the gateway to comprehending why Canada is there. Not that it doubts the validity of the Innis/Creighton interpretation of Canada's economic and political development; rather it holds up the other side to that story of finding a passage for trade and conquest, the other side on both a physical and a metaphysical level. This alternative view is that Canada is inherently continental, and that the heart to understanding Canada lies in this continentality and in the North – or as Wiebe puts it, 'I desire truth NORTH, not PASSAGE anywhere' (*PD*, p. 114).

Learning to live with the North (and possibly in the North) thus acquires metaphysical meaning as the necessary first step towards answering the question of what Canadians are doing here – or as Northrop Frye so famously phrased it 'Where is here?' On this point the comparison with Australia becomes a strong parallel rather than a contrast. For in recent Australian culture, similarly, the Red Centre or Dead Heart of the continent has become crucial to the metaphysical geography of identity: a development beginning in the 50s in the work of the great painters Drysdale, Nolan and Boyd, the poetry of Francis Webb and Randolph Stow, not to mention the fiction of Stow and Patrick White, where the desert gathers force as a great universal symbol, a vision of what the English art critic Peter Fuller has called 'the Antipodean Scapegoat' and which he believes is perhaps the fullest artistic realization of the post-modern human condition⁸ (but see also Clunies-Ross.⁹ This at the same time as the meaning of the desert has changed for a younger generation of Australian artists, has become 'intimate' to use Gary Catalano's phrase,¹⁰ in the work of painters like Williams and Olsen and Wolseley. A writer like David Ireland in a famous passage from *The Woman of the Future* locates the future there. The poet Les Murray in a poem called 'Louvres' changes the legend on maps that used to read 'Of No Significant Use' into 'the three quarters

of our continent/set aside for mystic poetry', as of course Murray is aware it has always been to the Pintubi, Anmatjera and Aranda peoples, who in the 70s and 80s have created in the blossoming Centre one of the world's most significant artistic movements based on abstract, story-telling landscape art.

Thus, although Australians still hug the coastline as Canadians hug the southern borders, both nations are beginning to come to terms with their continentality, a development much delayed, as Wiebe implies and Bruce Chatwin states fully in *Songlines*,¹¹ by an original settlement by the British who saw the world entirely in maritime terms. The reconceptualization necessary to come to terms with Canada's nordicity and continentality forms the core of the poetic argument in Wiebe's book of essays, which are not simply well-written expository historical prose, but a densely structured poetic forms of *belles-lettres*. A form literary critics have not yet doubted to death, and which perhaps for that reason seems to be coming in for somewhat of an international resurgence as a form in which to speak with some degree of seriousness, unlike fiction.

And serious *Playing Dead* is: a coming-to-terms not only with the North, but with the role and responsibility of the story-teller, and more personally – and secretly – with the death of Wiebe's son at the age of 24 (the book is dedicated to him). Two themes insist on recurring in all the essays: the theme of secrecy in the three stories at the heart of the essays (the narrative of the first and second Franklin expedition, the mystique of the mad trapper Albert Johnson about whom Wiebe had previously written a novel, and the life-work of the great popularizer of the Canadian Arctic, Vilhjalmur Stefansson) – and the interplay of the Heraclitean elements (earth, air, water, warmth and cold) which underpin the poetic argument of the book from the Copper Inuit story about the creation of ice, which introduced *Playing Dead*, to Orpingalik's shamanic 'My Breath' (recorded by Knud Rasmussen), with which the book ends. Wiebe manages to suggest a structure of imagery even in his quotations.

The elements make the coming to terms with the North literally a matter of life and death. The first essay begins with the assumption that the human being is 'a creature of earth and air' and that 'the only natural human boundary is water', the opposite assumption to that of the first sailors arriving in Canada, and to some extent opposite to the theory of evolution and the scientific theory of the constitution of the human body. Though water is the element without which life is impossible, it may still be our 'other' (especially to a man of the Prairies); water may be like the bear out to have Upaum for lunch in the Copper Inuit story about the origin of ice. Certainly the main confusion in the

book rises out of the form water takes: fluid, vaporous or solid, sea/river, fog or ice. At the beginning of the book the eye is at the opening of the mighty Mackenzie River, not knowing what is river or sea or mist, land appearing only a 'a darkness in air'. In the story of the first Franklin expedition, the British sailors and their canoe-skilled *coureurs des bois* stay too long mapping the northern coastline and so miss the fall migration of the caribou; in the story of the second Franklin expedition they sail into the breaking ice and are caught there – in striking contrast to the later great imaginative feat in polar exploration when Fritjof Nansen sails his ship into the ice and stays there, using ice power to circumnavigate the Pole. Wiebe, in a striking image of his own, imagines Franklin's ships discovering the only Northwest Passage there is – in death:

Perhaps in one or another of those endless, gigantic ice pressure ridges shifting, sinking, reshaping themselves forever in the ice streams that flow between the islands of the Canadian archipelago, *Erebus* and *Terror* [those hellish names!] are still carried, hidden and secret. Their tall masts are long since destroyed and their decks gouged, splintered, walled in by impenetrable floes, the ice shroud scraping over these great oaken sailing ships of empire, their skeleton crews rigid in a final posture of convulsive movement. They could be anywhere in the Arctic for the ice flows hundreds of kilometres a year; long separated now, perhaps at intervals the ice opens and one or the other is revealed for a moment or a year, a mast stump or a bowsprit reaching like a hand, briefly, up into the light somewhere off the coast of Ellesmere or Axel Heiberg islands. Or perhaps they have left the Canadian Arctic long ago and the ice has discovered to them the farthest Northwest passage of all, the circular passage that leads past the New Siberian Islands and between Novaya Zemlya and Franz Joseph Land, past West Spitzbergen [etc] ... until now, after a century and a half they are about to meet again for a moment at the place of their ultimate, fatal ignorance off the Western shore of King William Island. Perhaps then, with the discovery that the earth is always round, that death is always return, the ice will relent; then, beyond the indifferent sun and moon and the unborn Inuit children dancing with their umbilical cords which are the northern lights, then at last a living human being will be allowed to see them and cry, 'Here, here!' imagining of course that they have been there always, though hidden; cry, 'Here is *Erebus*! Here at last is *Terror*!' (PD, pp. 17-18)

The ice is far from motionless, we note. It also carries a secret, as does the opaque Mackenzie River in the middle essay 'On becoming Motionless':

You look into the moving, dark, strange Mackenzie River and you will see nothing but yourself; though you will not appear the same as you always imagine yourself. You follow a moving, dark strange man in linear (like the river) pursuit for six weeks along arctic mountains and rivers and an endless recrossing of tracks and what else can you expect to see? (PD, p. 61).

The man is Albert Johnson, the mad trapper, finally caught and killed by the posse when at 'a tight reversed S turn of the narrow river ... Johnson, deceived at last by the twists of the river, ran backwards in his own tracks because he thought the posse was already ahead of him'. Johnson who becomes an issue when it is discussed whether to exhume him to find out who he really was (his secret is his real identity, the name and his dramatic end merely a cover for his real self). Johnson who is a temptation to the story-teller because of his secret: why did he go mad and start killing? Johnson whom the local Loucheux Wiebe talks to think should be left alone (there was something about him!), and anyway the river periodically rises and moves the graveyard, so he may be somewhere else, confounding the factualist historians, but not the story-tellers: he has entered that web of story which is also the Arctic, the oral world of the Unit and the Indian, their oral historical atlas. That history remembers everything: even the secrets Wiebe discovers in the other two essays – Robert Hood's daughter with the Yellowknife Indian woman the Whites called Greenstockings and Vilhjalmur Stefansson's Inuit son.

In other works Wiebe has been concerned with recovering specific cultural memories: the memory of Big Bear, the Cree chief in his most famous novel, the collective memory of the Metis in *The Scorched-Wood People*, or of his own Mennonite community and family. In *Playing Dead* he is concerned with a more universal, cross-cultural level of memory. One is struck by the violence and the tragedy of the last Beothuk of Newfoundland after the genocide when she asks, 'Who will remember us?' (*PD*, p. 70); but also by the human warmth of Indians and Inuit when they save foolish Whites in the nick of time, the human warmth without which human life in the Arctic would be impossible. This level where the cultures meet is where history gives way to geography; it is the level of water:

movement within a landscape, whether on water or occasionally on land, can be seen in the linear image of water moving down to the sea, or ... the rivers being the tentacles of the protean sea reaching over the land. In other words the movement (life) of human beings is always analogous to the line water draws upon land. (*PD*, pp. 77-78)

But water, like life, has to be understood in all its forms and not just as passage to somewhere else, which the Arctic will always resist. Life, like water, has its vaporising mists, its solidifying frosts. The forms of water image the movement of meditation: from the zero visibility at the beginning of the first essay, where water and air become one, to the end of the last, where the permafrost melts and shows the solid earth to be water – and where the poetry quoted (by Inuit shamans as well

as by Pablo Neruda) dissipate the self – motionless, helpless, grief-stricken in the face of death – into the universal stream. This point of dissipation is also the point of arrival, a point of crucial metaphysical importance to writers of Wiebe's generation both in Canada and Australia: the point when the narrator of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* feels that she has become a place; when the narrator (the unnamed Ovid) of David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life* reaches 'the point on the earth's surface where I disappear', the point that is 'here, there, everywhere' and all times;¹² the ideal Taoist-inspired state in Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* and *Tourmaline* where the mind becomes a rock. The moment of arrival is also the moment of 'playing dead', which leads to Upaum's survival in the Copper Inuit story about the origin of ice.

The crux of meditative transformation is the reconceptualization of time and space in the North due to Wiebe's comprehension of the essential two-dimensionality of space in Inuktitut, the Inuit language, where the grammar distinguishes between visible phenomena that appear to be of equal dimensions (the *areal* dimension) and phenomena that appear to be longer than they are wide (the *linear* dimension). The first are also conceived of as motionless, the second as moving, so when a man on the ice starts moving he changes from one grammatical category to another. Moreover, an expanse of ice or land is always considered as belonging to the latter category. Arctic space is never inert, impenetrable, but always moving, penetrable. If you move with it, you will arrive.

This, I think, illustrates my point about psychology becoming geography – and geography being somehow enabling. Consider the difference to Margaret Atwood's 'thematic guide to Canadian literature' *Survival*, where she ultimately reduces the Canadian predicament to the psychological problem of victimization. Wiebe, I would suggest, opens up the problem by making it a matter of spatio-temporal reconceptualization – and that this is not merely a male kick is demonstrated by the work of Aritha van Herk, both in *The Tent Peg* and *Places Far From Ellesmere* and indeed by an alternative reading of Atwood's own *Surfacing*.

Spatio-temporal reconceptualization, a rethinking, revisioning of geography and history and their interrelation is, I want to suggest, a major preoccupation of Canadian and Australian literature in the 70s and 80s – especially among the most complex and philosophical writers of Wiebe's generation like the ones I have mentioned: Atwood, Malouf, Murray, Stow, Robert Kroetsch. Inevitably, it is a development that upsets generalizations like Russell McDougall's generally quite perspicacious theory that Canada tends to construct itself as a mosaic (perhaps a 'vertical mosaic') because of deep cultural divisions, or a deeply rooted multiculturalism if you like – whereas Australia tends to

construct itself around a centre: Ayers Rock, Sydney Harbour Bridge, Sydney Opera House – or even regional horrors like the Big Pineapple (on the American model).¹³ In Canada there would seem to be a movement away from regionalism to finding the possibilities for an overarching national identity in the North (though this may be a Western Canadian phenomenon, as the combination of Wiebe, Kroetsch and van Herk might suggest); in Australia there is definitely a movement away from monolithic national identity-building towards regionalism, even 'absolute regionalism' as David Malouf once called it. The entire work of David Malouf is a conscious reimagining of the world seen from the periphery, but not towards a centre – and the entire work of Les Murray is a decentering of the centre.¹⁴ Every attempt is to become areal and not linear, of rehearsing the details and not the overall perspective. To Les Murray, for instance, 'perspective' is a bad word as the ultimate spatio-temporal representation of European imperialism and social elitism. In his prose book on *The Australian Year* he thus describes the increasing interest in the Centre of Australia not only as a change from seeing it as a desert to seeing it as a delicate and intermittent parkland (it is one of the great wildflower regions of the world as Xavier Herbert was always pointing out), but also as a diffraction of the linear into spirals and clusters. Desert comes to mean not an Eliotic Waste Land, but an anchorite's desertum: 'a place of few people and no distractions where the spirit can achieve contemplation ... a place of simplicity, subtlety and clear connections, where the simplest thing has its story and can be emblematic'. Murray is thinking here of Aboriginal desert art as he is also in the continuation: 'High-speed lines give way to points and clusters: the clear blazing stars seemingly no more than fifty feet above your sleeping-bag, the circling rings of a drying water-hole, the infinite pointilism of yellow-top flowers.'¹⁵ The place in its 'vast stretching of Western categories such as the horizon or the line,' he concludes, 'can expand the spirit, or inflate the ego like the mythical frog who burst his belly with his own afflatus' in the Aboriginal story of how floods began, and why kookaburras laugh before it rains.

However, as the title suggests, Murray in his prose book and his more recent collection of poetry *The Idyll Wheel* has set himself the task of reconceptualizing not so much Australian space as Australian time. He is not concerned, as Wiebe is, with reimagining the continent as a true compass reading instead of an abortive passage, but with reimagining the seasons (the most significant import the Europeans brought to Australia, according to Murray) in a form appropriate to the Southern Hemisphere and Australia in particular. This he does by rehearsing the details, the minute changes of season of both the indigenous and the imported, the natural and the cultural order – but also by

the sweeping, bold gesture of identifying space and time. Australia is summer; summer in Australia is immanent, not transient:

In fact and in image, summer is the dominant season of the Australian year. It is our most Australian season, generator of the greatest number of indigenous images. Even in far southern places where it is in fact usually mild, the weight of its imagery often obscures local conditions. Stark Drysdale and Pro Hart paintings hang on many walls in Tasmania, calendar art hanging in pubs high in the New England ranges extols surfing and the beach. Summer is the blazing core of the year, and the other seasons can be seen as its surrounds ... (AY, p. 69)

Summer/Australia, then, is a great contracting and expanding fireball, which in its expanding phase sends all but its true devotees (a few White and more Black) out of its inner domains. All the other seasons appear to Murray to be palliatives and modifications, many of them imported (nearly all of autumn is imported, for instance).

Both Wiebe's and Murray's sweeping reconceptualizations thus upset the generalization that Australia and Canada (from a European perspective) are all geography, no history; all space, no time. The two are intimately connected, we can only talk about one from the vantage point of the other.

This is brought out also in Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*,¹⁶ which takes compass readings of different sites (Edberg, Edmonton, Calgary and Ellesmere Island) as they affect and are affected by the memory and consciousness of the speaking voice. The book sets out in an autobiographical mode and ends in a metafictional, beginning with something closely based on van Herk's own experience in her native Edberg and ending with a critical reading of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* on Ellesmere Island. The writing becomes increasingly 'literary' (overall it seems to be loosely based on the curious, long poetic stage-settings in William Faulkner's closet film-script *Requiem for a Nun*). At the same time as it increases its literary self-consciousness, however, the writing not so much deconstructs itself, as it 'slashes' itself (quite literally), drawing alternate readings from the flow of text and the individual word. Eddies round a snag in a stream; the sea broken by pebbles on a beach; geography reconstituting itself to the human mind: like *Places Far From Ellesmere*, all of history may be a 'geografictione.'

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2. Douglas C.D. Pocock, 'Interface: Geography and Literature,' *Progress in Human Geography* 12, 1 (1988), pp. 87-102.
3. Diana Brydon, 'Landscape and Authenticity: The Development of National Literature in Canada and Australia' *Dalhousie Review* 1981 (Summer), pp. 278-90; 'Troppo Agitato: Writing and Reading Cultures,' *Ariel* 19, 1 (1988), pp. 13-32.
4. McDougall, 'Sprawl and the Vertical' in R. McDougall and G. Whitlock, eds., *Australian/Canadian Literatures in English: Comparative Perspectives* (North Ryde: Methuen, 1987), pp. 205-37.
5. Graham Huggan, 'Decolonizing the Map: Post-Colonialism, Post-Structuralism and the Cartographic Connection,' *Ariel*, 20, 4 (1989), pp. 115-31.
6. Martin Leer, 'At the Edge: Geography and the Imagination in the Work of David Malouf,' *Australian Literary Studies* 12, 1 (1985), pp. 3-21.
7. Rudy Wiebe, *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic* (Edmonton: NeWest, 1989), p. 12. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
8. Peter Fuller, *The Antipodean Scapegoat: Towards an Antipodean Aesthetic* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1986).
9. Bruce Clunies-Ross, 'Landscape and the Australian Imagination' in P.R. Eaden and F.H. Mares, *Mapped But Not Known: The Australian Landscape and the Imagination. Essays and Poems Presented to Brian Elliott* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1986), pp. 224-43; 'Australian Literature and Australian Culture' in L.T. Hergenhan, ed., *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988), pp. 3-26.
10. Gary Catalano, *An Intimate Australia: The Landscape and Recent Australian Art* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1985).
11. Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987).
12. David Malouf, *An Imaginary Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1978); 'A First Place: The Mapping of a World,' *Southerly* 45, 1 (1985), pp. 3-10.
13. Russell McDougall, 'Opinion - On Location: Australian and Canadian Literature,' *True North/ Down Under* No. 4 (1985), pp. 11-42.
14. Martin Leer, *Edge to Centre: Geography and the Imagination in the Work of David Malouf, Randolph Stow and Les A. Murray*, Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Queensland: 1988.
15. Les A. Murray, *The Australian Year: The Chronicle of Our Seasons and Celebrations* (North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1985), p. 12; *The Daylight Moon* (North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1987); *The Idyll Wheel: Cycle of a Year at Bunyah, New South Wales April 1986-April 1987* (Canberra: Officina Brindabella, 1989).
16. Aritha van Herk, *Places Far From Ellesmere: A Geografictione. Explorations on Site* (Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1990).

The Life of Myth and its Possible Bearing on Erna Brodber's Fictions *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* and *Myal*

My impression is that Erna Brodber brings into play an unusual myth-making talent in her two novels at a time when myth is denigrated or undervalued in favour of a realism divorced from the intuitive imagination. Perhaps it would be wise to attempt to sketch in a kind of backcloth to the novels which may help, in some degree, to say what are my approaches to 'myth' before I come to the novels themselves.

It seems to me that the tragedy of the divorce at which I have hinted above is concealed at this time by sophistications, by various theories, that invest in the surfaces of existence as an absolute projection of invariant design that allows cultures to frame themselves up within virtually separate humanities in attunement to their prepossessions.

As a consequence the depth possibilities of communities to touch and re-create subtle links and bridges between multi-faceted nature and psyche are largely eclipsed by an enlightenment so-called that concerns itself with fields of experience geared to uniform (rather than cross-cultural) parentage of tradition. Such a retreat into patterns of closure or identity within (say) areas of the Third World in the twentieth century reveals at times astonishing and unsuspected parallels in other so-called advanced contemporary societies.

The price of a loaf of bread in the Soviet Union has not changed since 1922. One merely has to reflect on the state subsidies across close on seventy years, that are stretched and torn to breaking point in the maintenance of an identical economic code imprinted on a loaf of bread, to perceive that the surfaces of society are no projection of invariant ideology but on the contrary a mask concealing cataclysmic divisions and stress. It is doubtful however whether this conclusion has been reached by the majority of the Communist Party assembled at this moment in Congress as I write this Note.

It is not my intention to discuss the travail of the Russian economy except to indicate a naked instance of the concept of unchanging order that may inhibit cultures - whatever their apparent achievements - from arriving at re-creative and changed ways of reading reality to transform frames of difference and deepen a medium of vital diversity-in-universality.

Within the prosperous West, with its dazzling commodities and fluctuations of price, its dispersal of subsidy and inflation, the operation of invariant codes needs to be discerned in much more complex ways. One instance may be perceived perhaps in hidden biases within societies that surface to preserve invisible walls between races and cultures.

One may trace circumscriptions of imagination within institutional practices in the fall of the pre-Columbian civilizations of America within the Spanish Conquest of the sixteenth century. But it was not always so. Both parties - Sixteenth-century super-power Spain and the royal sun-cultures of pre-Columbian America - possessed ancient potential for mutual insight and re-visionary change within their forms and rituals. Spain possessed arts of memory that were still precariously active in Renaissance Europe when the conquistadores set sail: arts of memory signifying innermost objectivity, innermost variation and evolution in a medium of contrasting motifs of creativity. The pre-Columbian age possessed the legacies of Quetzalcoatl - however distant or seemingly lost - signifying the evolutionary wedding of earth and sky and linkages of outer space and inner space. But true change across the generations was bitter and slow in the wake of Conquest within what is now known as Latin America.

Let us glance at the fate of arts of memory in Renaissance Europe. They were still active in alchemy, in architecture and painting and literature, but a side of enlightenment was to split them into separate fields. Frances Yates, the distinguished scholar, has written with pregnant force of the enlightened thinkers who began the initiation of divisions within such arts, whether into fields of chemistry or weaponry that we now take for granted as separate areas of logic. Some such separation was inevitable one would think in liberating processes of experiment from obsolescent hierarchies and frames. But the enlightenment bred a paradox. It began to turn its back on the life of the intuitive imagination. It negated the necessity to visualize in new ways, to re-vision in new ways, to recall and re-interpret in far-reaching ways, subtle links and bridges between the arts and the sciences, between poem and painting, between music and figurations of memory associated with architecture.

One needs to leap into the heart of the twentieth century to appreciate the tragic consequences.

In her first novel *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980) Erna Brodber advances Anancy's 'kumbla' as sustaining capacities one may liken to the craft of freedom but also subsisting upon a borderline to mirror technologies of a prisonhouse and of frozen sensibilities. The 'kumbla' means many things that differ with different people, but it becomes, in the eye of Anancy trickster, a dangerous bridge in the malaise of tradition between craft and vocation and an imperilled world. Anancy succeeds in outwitting his antagonist and saving his children within the theatre of the 'kumbla', but the paradox or sinister borderline remains and one shall see soon how Erna Broder deals with this. 'But the trouble with the kumbla is the getting out of the kumbla. It is a protective device. If you dwell too long in it, it makes you delicate... Vision extra-sensitive to the sun and blurred without spectacles' (p. 130).

Robert Oppenheimer was possessed of parallel misgivings, I would suggest, in his vocation as a scientist in witnessing the Bomb he had helped to build, which others saw as a shield over the free world. His misgivings left him bereft before the image of Death he felt he had unwittingly sponsored, pure mathematics in separation from numinous art or creative conscience within the cement of an explosive, blinding shield or 'shatterer of worlds'.

Thus – it seems to me – a perverse cross-culturalism, a bridge from fearful vocation into shattered space, is born of divorced arts and sciences. It is unsurprising therefore that, as the twentieth century has continued to unfold, technologies that once seemed supreme in their mathematical logic or purity as engines of material progress are now agents of dread pollution. Science fiction makes game of mechanical monsters, but its illumination of the perverse as an end in itself is not a medium of therapeutic penetration of the ailments of cultures and communities.

When Anna Rutherford introduced me to Erna Brodber's novels I was struck immediately on reading them by the penetrated body of the text, by the numinous fractures in the surfaces of the narrative. Such penetration and fracture helped to give a sharper edge to borderlines such as we noted in Anancy's 'kumbla'. May I return now to the 'paradox of sinister borderline' in the 'kumbla' that we contemplated a short while ago. The ambiguity of the 'kumbla' is its protective armour that impoverishes vision. Blindness to manipulative techniques becomes natural. The light of perception becomes unnatural. One sees therefore how difficult it is to dislodge boundaries except by a deepening of the intuitive imagination, of inner space, by which to contemplate a psychological recovery from blindness. A blindness to the mystery of love makes love unnatural. The conversion of blindness therefore into a

medium of unsuspected healing light is not easily achieved but there is a wonderful evocation of the possibility in an encounter Nellie, the I-narrator in *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* has with her neighbours Miss Sada and Mass Stanley.

I could know as soon as I crept through the undergrowth of coffee trees that separated my father's land from his house how things were going with Mass Stanley. If he was in one of those quiet far away dreams, between Miss Sada and he, they would take away all the sunshine and the excitement and leave me in a cold, white cloudy November day without even the sound of rain drops. If she was in the kitchen, if she was washing outside, if she was in the hall, it didn't matter. Miss Sada would collect all the sunshine and the life from everywhere into herself and she would beam it at him. I would stand outside and see the light like the sun boring through two shrivelled shingles. It would come like the enlightening focus of a flashlight in the dark, beaming straight and constant from Miss Sada, whether it be her back or her knee or her hand, coming from whichever part of her was in direct line with Mass Stanley's head. I knew I couldn't cross it. (p. 105)

The boundary remains. She 'knew she shouldn't cross it'. But private space is deepened. The nature of blindness, the manipulative techniques that rob a community of access to original perception, is converted into a beam or psychical link between generations.

*Myal*² (1988) best embodies perhaps an intuitive leap or conversion of boundaries in Miss Gatha who rallies her West Indian community to overcome a threat of diseased intercourse between Mass Levi and the beautiful fifteen year old Anita. Levi immerses himself in spells to steal Anita's vital spirit. The threat runs therefore far deeper than a desire for sexual possession. It is another version of a sinister borderline, a circumscription of soul on which Levi is intent.

Miss Gatha's march upon Levi is akin to a rallying of forces from crevices of being beneath and above the surfaces of existence. Levi is, in a sense, a doomed tyrant, a doomed 'spirit thief'. Yet his doom was not inevitable. He may have succeeded in his plan. He was not directly known to Miss Gatha who brought him down – it seems to me if I read the novel aright – within an activation of 'subconscious/unconscious' layers of imagination or arts of memory. Such arts are not an embodiment of formula. If anything they breach formula within unpredictable re-visionary cycles of the imagination in which specificities of landscape, vessels, recesses, rooms, spaces etc. are converted into a theatre of soul as boundaries move, shift, re-settle, turn into a loom of sign-posts that need to be read in new lights.

Agatha Paisley's witchcraft recalls the deceptions by which Shakespeare's Macbeth judged himself immune to nemesis until the immovable forest moved. The very forest becomes the witches' prophetic cloak

converted now into a 'private hurricane' within another age, another century.

I shall quote a passage from *Myal* that is relevant to what I have just said but first let me underline certain issues of the witches' camouflage. The conversion of the witches' prophetic march in the guise of a moving forest – as it affects a West Indian witch or trickster, in this instance – is to be associated, I think, with the intuitive force of a train of imageries coming earlier in the novel. That train invokes a rhythmic borderline between dance and trance-like possession, between possibilities for pregnant truth and the drain of abortive adventure, between investments and disinvestments in camouflage. In the context of camouflage the figure of Ole African is to be reckoned with. It is Ole African's masquerade that inspires a jigsaw intervention on the occasion when pebbles rain on Anita's house. The pebbles cease. The poltergeist menace subsides. But Levi has not yet been defeated. The preservation of a shelter for Anita is no more than a suspension of lurking terror that the community has to wrestle with through and in itself. An invisible body creeps into Anita's bed and waits its chance. Thus Gatha's access to layers of ancient withchcraft, in the subconscious/unconscious, is a revelation of unsuspected theatre in the body of an apparently marginal community in the West Indies. Her 'private hurricane' or moving wood is threaded backwards into the rhythms of the narrative to gain momentum, so to speak, in foiling the dread tyrant: a momentum born of the past yet of an unpredictable arousal of resources in a voyage of psyche on land and on sea as one senses when 'legs and thighs are oars' in the passage I shall now quote.

Silent Miss Gatha started to talk. Anyone who had seen Miss Agatha Paisley in the spirit before would think is a coconut tree in a private hurricane that was coming down to the road. Or somebody else might say is Birnamwood come to Dunsinane. Miss Gatha looking like she had a warning. The long green dress with the tiny red flowers, the head-tie of the same print tied rabbit-ear fashion, the big wooden circles in her ears and the bunch of oleander gripped tight in her hands like they were one and the same. And the swinging and the swaying and the twirling! Miss Gatha now have no ordinary foot walking thump-thump and mashing the stones down into the mud. Toes only and the legs and the thighs are oars. (p. 70)

The force of Brodber's fiction lies, I have suggested, in its intuitive bearing on apparently incorrigible boundaries that sustain the hidden tyrannies or biases or loss of integrity of soul in an ailing world. Ella, of *Myal*, of whom I have not spoken before, is an important character in portraying the ravages of such communal or global ailment. Those ravages, I find, are all the more telling in that Ella is a kind of innocent

victim whose 'clarity' – as the novel draws to a close – is attained after much suffering. From childhood she is the victim of taunts, of implicit abuse, because of her half-white status. She is adopted by Maydene Brassington and her Jamaican husband, a minister of religion. Maydene is an Englishwoman, her husband William, like Ella, is of mixed blood. Ella marries an American called Selwyn who is unable to help her and who appears to bring her latent disease, her incapacities, to a climax. Those incapacities border upon a nucleus of transfigurative and far-flung resources in herself. But that nucleus remains so blocked away that she is divided in herself, she remains strangely ignorant of a text of being that is eclipsed within her. Such eclipse – if I may so put it – makes her Selwyn's victim. In place of her inner text he writes a play that is built on a series of manipulations and perverse exploitations of folk-memories that he takes from her.

Ella has no recourse but to return to Jamaica from the United States. She has become a kind of zombi, but the seed or nucleus of transfigurative dimensionality remains: 'Long conversations between her selves took place in her head. Mostly accusations' (p. 84).

Is she – in her estranged body – a curious talking mirror reflecting the ailments and potential therapies of her sick society? She 'looks into Anita's eyes and talks to her ... asks questions of Teacher and Miss Amy. It so happened that with a fuller view of Grove Town and its people, came also a fuller view of her immediate surroundings... She felt cold... She was beginning to feel dry. Over-drained' (p. 81).

Ella – as half-talking, half-silent mirror bordering upon territories of 'zombification' that exists everywhere in a tormented humanity – is relevant perhaps to what I have previously described in this article as 'perverse cross-culturalism'.

In such perversity, it is not only 'rogues in Whitehall' who need to 'change their tune', but – in Reverend Simpson's words – the roots of 'zombification' are to be traced in 'a phenomenon common in parts of Africa and in places like Haiti and Brazil, they tell me... People are separated from parts of themselves that make them think and they are left as flesh only. Flesh that takes directions from someone... There are persons trained to do the separation... Spirit-thieves' (p. 108).

Simpson's parable – with its global interconnections in new worlds and old – brings back in a different way the issue of 'enlightenment', of which I spoke earlier in this article.

Is it not possible to see Ella as the victim of an 'enlightenment' that has long concentrated in the humanities on patterns of behaviourism as a logical field in itself?

Does not behaviourism discard the eruptive unconscious, the life of the psyche as subversive and also as potentially creative?

'Flesh that takes directions from someone' may well have some area of its residence in a psychology of behaviourism – investing in surfaces of existence – that opens the way, however unwittingly, to losses of inner reality and manipulation by hollow media (p. 110).

Within the long march of the twentieth century there are distinctions of behaviour, I have no doubt, between liberals and revolutionaries, saints and sinners, to be measured by political and clinical investigators, but then *possession*, the curiously real/unreal depths of the possessed mind divorced from, yet obscurely triggered by, layers of reality may come into focus in some degree. And 'flesh that takes direction from someone (may) bring to mind the empty temple into which seven devils worse than baalzebub could enter' (p. 108).

I am aware that Ella becomes the catalyst of a revolutionary cell or movement which involves Reverend Simpson and affects the Brassingtons and others. But I would venture upon a certain caution. The ebb and flow of passion, the 'draining', in Ella's flesh and estranged body, is sometimes invoked – it seems to me – in a much too flattened prose-narrative. The consequence is involuntary parody. The endemic deprivations of the community may unwittingly parody a constitution of innocence. If *Myal* were a linear fiction this would not matter. Indeed within the progressions of realism, with which we are familiar, it would be appropriate. But Brodber's narrative style penetrates surfaces and raises unsuspected edges of light and dark. There is no doubt that she is a writer of unusual talent.

NOTES

1. Erna Brodber, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (London: New Beacon, 1980). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
2. Erna Brodber, *Myal* (London: New Beacon, 1988). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.

Engineering the Female Subject: Erna Brodber's *Myal*

At a recent staff-postgraduate seminar hosted by the English Department at U.W.I., Cave Hill, Glyne Griffith presented an analysis of Roger Mais's fiction in which he interrogated certain traditional notions of authorial omniscience and called attention to the *power* inherent in representation. The omnipotent omniscient narrator, unknowable and beyond challenge, solicits the reader's absolute trust in authorial placing or definition of characters, from whom the narrator maintains a god-like distance. Within this type of literary discourse, inherited from mainstream English fiction of the nineteenth century, characters are 'written': that is, settled, solidified or, as Harris¹ would have it, 'consolidated' and fixed for ever.

When these characters are fixed in a certain way – as colonials, non-European 'natives' – colonial readers have a certain problem in confronting themselves as written. Post-colonial literary theory has helped to expose the nature of such authorial strategy: western texts place the colonial as 'Other', whose role is simply the self-consolidation of the Master, the (European) 'norm' of universal subject. Much of the literary canon adopted by West Indian schools and universities either ignores the West Indian character or 'writes' him, and thus defines him, as Other: an object, rather than a knowing subject. And this Other is necessary to the self-presence of the 'universal subject' because, according to post-modernist theory as I understand it, 'otherness' (alterity) is implicit in whatever is given primacy since any constituted identity is only as it differs from or defers to something else (différence). So identity – self-presence – made possible by 'différence', results in the diminution of that which it contains as its possibility of functioning as meaning (that is, the Other).

Now, as Helen Tiffin points out, 'the Caribbean "other" had been constituted in European textuality *before* Columbus's invasion of the area. Columbus did not "see" a new world; like Cortez after him, he read it in terms of European *pre-texts* which had already constituted "alterity".² I presume she refers here to the European construction (in centuries of fiction, travel narrative, history and so on) of the savage/

native/heathen peoples as those inferior Others against which European (superior/normative) self-presence defines itself. The maintenance of this alterity involved the 'social mission' of imperialism (the 'pure' motive of civilizing the heathen, bringing him into line with the 'norm' as defined above) which was used to justify colonial expansion and exploitation. Part of the 'social mission', Tiffin maintains, involved education and here, literature was complicit. Stephen Slemon clarifies the involvement:

One of colonialism's most salient technologies for social containment and control is the circulation within colonial cultures of the canonical European literary text. Mediated through the colonialist educational apparatus, the European literary text becomes a powerful machinery for forging what Gramsci called cultural domination by consent....³

Works such as *The Tempest* or *Robinson Crusoe*, which Tiffin calls 'the classic formulations of Europe's encounters with alterity,' were used as teaching aids, not so much for educating the 'heathen' about Europe but, in presenting these versions as great literature dealing in 'universals', for the purpose of inculcation in the mind of the colonial the 'truth' that 'his/her subjectification was as natural as water, or the sky.'⁴

This process is termed 'spirit thievery' by Erna Brodber in her second award-winning novel *Myal*⁵, and the internalization of this 'natural' relationship between European norm and native Other gives rise to an alienation in the colonial of such severity as to be imaged as 'zombification'. As Brodber explains,

I have this notion that colonialism, as it operated in [the West Indies], was a theft of culture – a theft in a strange way. The English have brought in all these African peoples, who have a particular world view, and they insist on taking this world view away from them, which is in fact their *spirit*. Without it, you cannot live; without it you're just plain 'flesh'...only dry bones, rotten flesh.⁶

In other words, the 'world view' (discourses) of these imported peoples was appropriated by force and they were rendered powerless by being rewritten (and themselves adopting such a version) within imperial discourse as Other, exotic, inferior: a trauma resulting in their 'zombification', 'Flesh that takes direction from someone' (*Myal*, p. 108).

A society of zombies is, obviously, an unhealthy society. Appropriately, *Myal* examines the society in microcosm through the mysterious swelling-sickness of Ella O'Grady Langley. Ella embodies the Jamaican national motto ('Out of Many, One People') as she does its history of plantation (she is mulatto, of Irish-Jamaican parentage, and married to an American). In the Afro-Jamaican peasant community of Grove Town,

she is an outsider, like the Rev. William Brassington: 'One strange face in a sea of colour. Lonely among [her] own people' (*Myal*, p. 17). Compensating for her invisibility in her own world, she imaginatively enters the world of 'away' – maps of Europe, books of English literature – and floats, as Tiffin puts it, through her Grove Town life like a ghost, her mind, quite literally, elsewhere. Hence Maydene Brassington's impression of her as 'flying. Totally separated from the platform and from the people around her' (*Myal*, p. 17).

What Maydene also intuitively is that this isolated, unrooted and ethereal existence is distressing to the child: 'she is not happy up there in the sky. She wants to be real' (*Myal*, p. 17). Attempting to mitigate Ella's ontological insecurity, the Brassingtons adopt her, pay for her training and allow her to travel as 'ladies companion' to the United States.

Here, she meets Selwyn Langley (ironically, as it turns out, the last in a long line of healers) who successfully courts her, marries her and proceeds to rewrite her. No African ancestry *please* – she is to say that *both* her parents were Irish; then comes 'the powdering and the plucking of eyebrows, the straightening of the hair, all of which a loving husband did.... The creator loved his creature' (*Myal*, p. 43). Selwyn's task is easy for Ella 'had a lifetime of practice' living in other people's fictions, and those whom he wishes Ella to approximate are similar to 'the pale-skinned people floating' in the texts she has learned by heart.

A true imperialist, Selwyn also appropriates Ella's past. To an extent, her body is the site of an archaeological reconstruction.⁷ For it is in the discovery of her sexuality that Ella experiences herself as real and the gauze/mists, which have obscured the remembrance of her Jamaican world, melt away under Selwyn's insistent probing. As she begins to tell it, Grove Town and its people are unearthed and *live* for her as for Selwyn – albeit in very different ways.

Unfortunately, Selwyn withdraws – prematurely for Ella who desires a future (a child) as well as her constructed past. 'She had given and was giving all she had,' he muses; 'but he would want more. In-laws with real pedigree for instance' (*Myal*, p. 80). But he is an author in more ways than one, and his parting gift is this master-narrative of her history: *Caribbean Nights and Days* 'the biggest coon show ever [staged]' (*Myal*, p. 80). Ella's horror at this travesty of her past ('spirit theft') in which she realizes she has unconsciously colluded, causes her to 'trip out'. She ceases to talk and is afflicted with a swollen belly for which no western medical remedy can be found. In addition, she suffers the symptoms of dissociation which recur in the work of Brodber and other female West Indian writers⁸: for example, she holds 'long conversations between her selves' (*Myal*, p. 84).

The reintegration of Ella is as much a spiritual as a physical process. The myal man, Maas Cyrus (Percy the chick) who effects the cure, is both natro-path (healing with natural remedies) and 'restorer of spirits'⁹. In addition, he does not work alone. He belongs to a 'healing team' which includes Baptist minister Simpson (Mr. Dan), the dreadlocked hermit Ole African (Master Willie), Miss Gatha (Mother Hen) who heads a Kumina church, and Maydene Brassington (White Hen), the English wife of the Methodist pastor. Together, they constitute a kind of Jamaican continuum from traditional herbalism to religious (and thus, educational) subversion. If spirit thievery comes in so many forms then its antidote must be drawn from all kinds of wisdom.

Ella's adoptive father lends his support; but, once again, this is a mutual affair. For in taking her to the myal man for help, Reverend Brassington too 'was promised a cure' (*Myal*, p. 94). In fact, it is in the figure of the mulatto William that Brodber's exposure of the imperial mission is most thorough. Like Ella, he is a victim of definition through European *pre-text*. However, his sense of his ministry coincides with Kipling's injunction (prettily recited by Ella early in the novel) to 'Take up the whiteman's burden ... Go bind your sons to exile / To serve your captive's need ... [that is:] Your new caught sullen peoples / Half devil and half child' (*Myal*, p. 6). William sees his community in terms of its representation in colonial discourse: "'My people have a far way to go and a far way we can go but we must understand how far back we are and submit so that we can learn'" (*Myal*, p. 21). His task, as he sees it, is to 'exorcise and replace.' (*Myal*, p. 18): exorcise traditional Afro-Jamaican practices and values and replace them with 'civilized' western thinking and Christianity. No wonder his wife accuses him of 'taking away these people's spirit' (*Myal*, p. 18).

I have attempted to illustrate how Brodber's fiction discovers the various strategies by which the colonized person is constructed within, and in terms of, imperial discourse, and the terrible alienation which results. How to fight back, how to restore the 'zombi' to full personhood? The final section of *Myal* elaborates a 'remedy' envisioned by the healing team: 'Get in their books and know their truth, then turn around [slave] ship and books into those seven miles of the Black Star line so desperately needed and take who will with you' (*Myal*, p. 67). In other words, expose 'the printed word and the ideas it carries' (p. 109), then 'correct images from the inside, destroy what should be destroyed, replace it with what it should be replaced and put us back together' (p. 110). In short, to turn William's ministry back on itself, 'exorcise and replace': subvert, rewrite and in so doing, transform the texts and images of Western imperialism. It is fitting that the task should fall to the reconstructed colonial Other (Ella) using that tool of

colonial brainwashing (formal education) which had previously been her escape route.

Ella's job demands that she teach the 'parable' of Mr. Joe's (Animal) farm in the *Caribbean Reader* familiar to generations of West Indians. The story tells of enslaved animals, alienated from their natural functions, who decide to rebel. Subsequently discovering in their 'freedom' that they are still utterly dependent, they meekly return to their masters, to a subordinate existence as 'living deads capable only of receiving orders from someone else and carrying them out' (*Myal*, p. 107). Ella is repulsed by this reduction of individuals to 'sub-normals who have no hope of growth' (p. 97) and worse, by her own role of inviting eager youngsters 'into complicity' in the (natural) truth that 'most of the world is made up of zombies who cannot think for themselves or take care of themselves but must be taken care of' (*Myal*, p. 107). In discussion, the colonizing intentionality is exposed and both Ella and William decide to teach against the text by pointing out its bias and so telling 'The half [that] has never been told' (*Myal*, p. 34).

Helen Tiffin makes the crucial observation that *Myal* both describes 'counter-discursive strategy, which reads the social text of colonialist power and exposes and dismantles it'¹⁰ and is itself a paradigmatic theoretical document in demonstrating that '[t]extuality and politics are inseparable, complicit in the colonialist enterprise'¹¹, therefore the writer's interrogation and unmasking of European 'pre-texts' is crucial to the decolonization process. The farmyard parable, like Kipling's poem, exemplifies the text which reinforces the imperial construction of the West Indian as Other; *Myal* epitomizes the text which disrupts such a programme of spirit theft.

It is possible to explore a further dimension of this recuperation of the colonial subject, and the West Indian writer's handicap in attempting the project within a practice of fiction implicitly carrying a epistemological justification of Empire. This further dimension involves gender. What of the constitution of the *female* colonial subject by a *female* Caribbean writer operating within the patriarchal, as well as imperialist traditions? For if the 'native' is the site of the European master's self-presence, the woman is that of the man's. In traditional patriarchal discourse (by which I mean a way of seeing the world, expressed in literary as well as other kinds of texts – and in social practices and institutions which support them – through which a dominant group imposes as *normative* a particular version of the truth for the implicit purpose of maintaining its power structure), in this discourse, woman is constituted as Other and her function is the self-consolidation of the

'normal' universal male subject. She is necessary to the maintenance of his primacy because her supposedly characteristic attributes (passivity, corporeality, emotionality, irrationality and so on) 'prove' the male's superior 'différence' and justify the 'natural' subjugation of woman for her own, the children's, the society's sake. Self-hood or subjectivity, as a concept in patriarchal discourse, rests upon feminine alterity; and the achievement of full subject-status (agency) is denied women. This, of course, has been thoroughly illustrated in feminist re-readings of the Euro-American literary canon.

What of the West Indian canon? Until fairly recently, this was very much male-dominated,¹² and representation of the female was either consolidation of stereotype (self-sacrificing mother; inarticulate victim; sexual chattel; symbol of transcendent value) or relegation to the periphery of narrative. Of course, there were exceptions and one can argue that male writers simply reflected the contemporary actuality of women's socio-economic status in the Caribbean; but these reservations hardly nullify the general point.

For the Caribbean woman writer, the literary conception of subject/character (the norm of human-ness) has been male. Patricia Waugh's relevant study, *Feminine Fictions*¹³, seeks to account for the nature of subjectivity in patriarchal discourse by referring to psychoanalytic theory, particularly that of Jacques Lacan. For the male, she claims, Lacan seems to suggest that

selfhood is conceived in terms of disidentification with the mother and identification with a father who symbolizes the larger culture, [and] it is the father who is seen to carry the reality principle. For a boy, the disidentification with the mother will be more radical and selfhood more likely to be defined absolutely in terms of autonomy and objective distance. (p. 72)

Waugh concludes that men are psychologically and socially developed to exaggerate separateness and deny affective connection as the *basis* of identity (p. 85). Their subjectivity involves splitting off the unbounded, the inchoate and the emotional on to women (who are associated with an earlier pre-oedipal period of total non-separation from, and then total dependency on, the mother figure).

However, Lacan views *all* human agency, determination and identity as merely the illusory effects of the individual's positioning within a (patriarchal) 'symbolic order' which necessarily *pre-exists* him or her. Lacanian thinking thus supports post-modernist literary theory's discrediting of the 'unitary, self-directing, isolated ego' as subject. The matrix of textuality renders invalid the conventional novelistic subject/character. Similarly, since the text is an interplay of infinite possibilities of signification, my concern with the intentions of the female writer

becomes irrelevant: it is the reader who is the site of meaning, for the text is an *event* which happens to, and only with the participation of the reader.

But Waugh raises a crucial point when she notes that 'for those marginalized by the dominant culture, a sense of identity as constructed through impersonal and social relations of power (rather than a sense of identity as the reflection of an inner 'essence') has been a major aspect of their self-concept long before post-structuralists and post-modernists began to assemble their cultural manifestos' (p. 3). Post-modernism, she feels, stresses the inability of the contemporary subject to locate 'himself' historically; feminist theory, however, starts from the *necessity* of locating the female subject: that is, 'a sense of effective agency and history for women which has hitherto been denied them by the dominant culture' (p. 9). Helen Tiffin too has queried 'post-structuralism's critique of the centred subject' because she feels it has often 'displaced a historically specific, culturally grounded critique of colonialist power and subsumed real social difference in a western obsession with epistemological legitimization.'¹⁴ The post-modernist agenda is not necessarily that of the feminist or post-colonial writer.¹⁵

For feminists, then, and by implication for women writers, the necessity of locating a coherent female subject is paramount even though they find problematic the (male) norm of 'unitary, self-directing, isolated ego' thrown out by post-modernism. Some women writers, she concedes, have accepted the inevitable alienation of the female 'I' in patriarchal discourse, hence their fictions feature 'mad', schizophrenic or paranoid women who experience themselves as culturally defined *images* – and thus, as nothing (one is reminded of Rhys's Antoinette and her concern with her mirrored image in *Wide Sargasso Sea*). But what if one conceives of another kind of subject, such as 'a collective concept of subjectivity which foregrounds the construction of identity *in relationship*' (Waugh, p. 10). Instead of the individual's selfhood coming into being at the moment of radical disidentification from the Other (mother), who then becomes an object against which the individual *defines* his/her subjectivity (p. 10), Waugh considers Nancy Chodorow's notion of the infant as object-seeking (rather than Freud's theory of pleasure-seeking) which suggests that its basic desire is for human *relationship*. Why should subjectivity be synonymous with separation when, on Chodorow's terms, it is absolutely bound up with the sense of relationship with others?¹⁶

Accordingly, Waugh cites women writers such as Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, who refuse any unitary concept of the self which needs 'Other' as self-evident opposite, and seem less interested in the quest of the isolated individual in their

fiction than in positing a character whose maturity involves *recognition* of her construction (from a range of subject positions available in several discourses) through the collective. Instead of division from, mutuality with. So, while acknowledging that there is no *one* female style, she observes that '[i]n formal aesthetic terms, breaking down boundaries, loosening distinct outlines, merging the individual with the collective, and exploring the ambiguity of identity at the interface of subject and object are likely to be stronger in women writers' (pp. 80-81).¹⁷ Narrative strategy thus facilitates a vision of society

where, indeed, difference would not be separation, but connection which does not threaten autonomy – a collectivism that preserves the individual self. Such writing constructs a new subject, one who is necessarily 'dispersed' but who is also an effective agent, neither the old liberal subject nor the contemporary post-structuralist site of the play of signification (p. 169).

I was struck by the relevance of Waugh's alternative authorial strategy for construction of female subjectivity ('in relationship'; 'through the collective') to Brodber's *Myal*.

Initially, the construction of female subject (Ella) by male author (Selwyn) involves 'domination by consent' and resulting alienation for Ella. She is entirely dependent on Selwyn's directions, affections and ministrations (she 'was hooked and she liked the drug', p. 43). Ultimately, Ella is *his* creature, empty of herself and forbidden to do/make anything (the child she desires and he prevents) within the relationship. Like Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* she is simply a shadowy Other to the husband, a zombi, a 'marvellously sculpted work waiting for the animator' (*Myal*, p. 46).

Brodber teases out variations of spirit thievery. One of the novel's 'sub-plots' concerns Maas Levis' attempts to restore his sexual prowess (his maleness, his self-presence), again at the expense of female subjectivity (Anita's spirit), through the arcane obeah ritual of a 'voodoo doll' with 'the bright new nail through her neck' (*Myal*, p. 75).

Having represented the construction of a female subject within a patriarchal tradition, how does the West Indian woman writer attempt an alternative? Here Waugh's insights prove to be accurate. For what Brodber has affected is the *re*-construction of her female character/subject (as integrated agent rather than alienated zombi) by the communality of her society.

I have argued elsewhere¹³ that narrative voice in *Myal* is elusive. The novel demonstrates a 'diffusion' of omniscient narrator's power of representation, through the employment of an 'alter/native' (to borrow from Helen Tiffin) mode of telling which must, because it draws on the oral creole tradition (and the social history encoded therein) be com-

munal. So many voices input into this story: 'Everybody thought ... Miss Iris did not know ... Things started from early ... Cook say it was like ...' In so far as one can occasionally identify an authorial voice, it speaks the language of the community (living and dead) and moves fluidly from ironic detachment to intimate in-group 'susu'.

As is usual, this new officer came to town with no wife and needed a housekeeper. As is also usual, the housekeeper was before long in the family way. What was unusual, was for said housekeeper to refuse to move to Kingston's anonymity to be kept by her baby-father and to opt to go back to her country bush.... so although he did have every desire to do right by Mary, things had to finish, done, end: they had was to part, my dear. (*Myal*, p. 6)

In addition, communal voice employs a wide range of discursive techniques¹⁹: we are treated to anecdotes, songs and spells, statistics, dreams and lyrical fantasies, tongue-in-cheek pronouncements, puns, cosy practical wisdom, schoolbook stories and parables. The overall effect is less a medley of voices than a collective voice, with its own internal logic and contradictions.

Furthermore, Ella's healing (bringing into being as a subject) is the collective effort of a powerful group within Grove Town society. They are from different nationalities, races, sexes and backgrounds; they transcend spatial boundaries, communicating via a kind of telepathy; they cross boundaries of time, in that the group comprises individual characters who *also* embody elements of ancestral personalities; they even transcend genre distinctions: each character in Brodber's story is also a character in the schoolbook allegory of Mr. Joe's farm. Both distinct personalities *and* a composite force, simultaneously represented in two different but related texts, part of the Grove Town moment and incarnate ancestral presences, they function like separate instruments whose meaning/power exists in the fusion of musical performance.

Working together, this group transforms the present by negotiating between different 'realities' (that is, Myalism, Kumina, West Indian variants of the Baptist and Methodist churches) than those offered by the master to perform a healing ritual whose valency 'lies outside a western episteme, and therefore outside its control'.²⁰ The fractured, 'pre-scripted' past of the colonial subject is recuperated and articulated *within*, this time, the group's own diffuse, eclectic creole discourse.

Brodber's text does seem to illustrate on several fronts Waugh's conception of a 'female style': her narrative blurs boundaries between reality and illusion, loosens distinct outlines of characters (living and dead, fictional and 'real'), merges the individual with the collective personality and (as I attempted to demonstrate in the first part of this essay) explores the ambiguity of identity 'at the interface of subject and

object.' Clearly, Brodber eschews any notion of fixed, unitary subject in a novel which details such various modes of being. Accordingly, her work can be located within post-structuralist practice, with its emphasis on meaning as constituted through *language* (that is, within particular – sometimes conflicting – discursive fields, each of which offers certain subject positions) and the necessary positing of subjectivity as unstable, changing, or as Chris Weedon terms it, always 'in process'. At the same time, Brodber does not suspend the notion of integrated, historically located female subject. Her narrative strategy applies also to Ella's reconstruction: identity is a communal affair, impossible of constitution in defensive isolation or at the expense of the devalued Other.

As Cliff Lashley pointed out, in the post-graduate seminar I alluded to at the start of this essay, such a narrative strategy changes the whole basis of the way in which character is represented. In refusing any 'consolidation' of female personhood by handing over her narrative to a communal voice, whose linguistic system/discourse is, as Cliff noted, *outside* the cosmology of the master-narrative, Brodber thus subverts both colonial and patriarchal discourse in one go. In that it is this collective narrative which (literally) 'author/izes' the reconstructed Ella, then her maturity as a subject (Waugh again) comes through her recognition of the relational nature of her identity and her commitment to the preservation of her community 'spirits' at the end of the novel.

Yes, one can accept that the subject, male *and* female, is, as Waugh puts it (p. 210) 'historically determined and discursively situated'; but *Myal* demonstrates that 'human will, subversive desire, and the consolidation of human *connectedness* can still exist as effective forces of political change' (emphasis mine). It is interesting that what Pamela Mordecai terms 'the problem of the restoration of community in the West Indies'²¹ is being addressed by a Caribbean woman writer within her fictional engineering of a Caribbean female subject.

NOTES

1. Wilson Harris, 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel', *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London and Port of Spain, New Beacon, 1967), pp. 28-47.
2. Helen Tiffin, 'Rites of Resistance: Counter-Discourse and West Indian Biography', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3, 1 (January, 1989), p. 29.
3. Stephen Slemon, 'Modernism's Last Post', *Ariel* 20, 4 (October, 1989), p. 7.
4. Helen Tiffin, 'Rites of Resistance', p. 29.
5. Erna Brodber, *Myal* (London and Port of Spain, New Beacon, 1988). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
6. Erna Brodber, informal interview with Evelyn O'Callaghan (Dec 29, 1983) cited in E. O'Callaghan, "'Spirit thievery comes in so many forms': a review of *Myal* by Erna Brodber', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 4, 1 (January 1990), p. 52.

7. I use the term as does Alan Nadel in 'Reading the Body: Alice Walker's *Meridian* and the Archaeology of Self', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 34, 1 (Spring, 1988), p. 56.
8. See Evelyn O'Callaghan, 'Interior Schisms Dramatised: the treatment of the 'mad' woman in the work of some female Caribbean novelists', in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds., *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton, N.J., Africa World Press, 1990), pp. 89-108.
9. Nadine Wilkins, 'The Medical Profession in Jamaica in the Post-Emancipation Period', *Jamaica Journal* 21, 4 (November 1988 - January 1989), p. 28. Wilkins explains the physical and metaphysical nature of myalism.
10. Helen Tiffin, unpublished paper delivered at Queens University, Canada (Fall 1989), p. 17. Tiffin acknowledges that the paper draws on a jointly-written introduction by Stephen Slemon and herself to *After Europe: Essays in Post-Colonial Criticism* (Coventry, Dangaroo Press, 1988), pp. ix-xxiii.
11. Helen Tiffin, 'Rites of Resistance', p. 30.
12. See Pamela Mordecai and Elizabeth Wilson, introduction to *Her True-True Name: An Anthology of Women's Writing from the Caribbean* (London, Heinemann, 1989), pp. ix-x.
13. Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London & N.Y., Routledge, 1989). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
14. Tiffin, unpublished paper to Queens University, p. 7.
15. Chris Weedon, however, attempts to reconcile post-structuralist discourse theory and feminist practice in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987). While post-structuralism does 'deny the authenticity of individual experience by decentring the rational unitary, autonomous subject of literary humanism, or the essential female nature at the centre of much radical feminism, rendering it socially constituted with discourse' the female individual nonetheless 'exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices ... and able to choose from the options available' (p.125).
16. See Chris Weedon's discussion of Chodorow's psychoanalytic theory: 'Chodorow argues that mothering involves a woman in a double identification, with her mother and with her child, in which she repeats her own mother-child history. This results in a stronger bond between mother and daughter than between mother and son and a lesser degree of individuation in the case of girls, who consequently develop more flexible ego boundaries' Men lack the extended personal relations which women have and 'their relationships with other men tend to be based not on particularistic connection or affective ties, but rather on abstract, universalistic role expectations', (pp. 58-9).
17. Note Weedon's description of the theory of Susan Griffin who 'rejects patriarchal language, logic and linearity in favour of a diffuse web of meaning constructed from various discourses, from historical facts and scientific quotations to poetry' (p. 134). See also note 19, below. A reference to Susan Griffin is *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (London, The Women's Press, 1984).
18. Evelyn O'Callaghan, "'Spirit-thievery comes in so many forms'".
19. See, for example, the section which begins on p. 6 of *Myal*, where different forms of knowledge (discourses?) are used to account for Ella's past - religious, scientific, myalistic, folkloric, salacious gossip and so on.
20. Tiffin, unpublished paper to Queens University, p. 18.
21. Introduction to *Her True-True Name*, p. xiv.

David Dabydeen

INTERVIEW

David Dabydeen's first novel, *The Intended*, was published by Secker & Warburg in February 1991. Frank Birbalsingh interviewed David Dabydeen prior to the publication of the novel.

I always found it puzzling that you came to England so young.

I came in the migration from the West Indies to Britain in the 1960s. I was born in Berbice, Guyana, and grew up surrounded by half eclipsed memories of India that were gained through watching films or through observation as a boy of Hindu rituals. I was also fascinated by the fact that every three months or so some pandit would come along to bless something or other. I remember, we had moved to the town of New Amsterdam which was largely Afro-Guyanese, and relations between them and us Indo-Guyanese were cordial and normal, apart from the normal biases and innocuous prejudices which operate on a day to day level. I went to school in New Amsterdam. But, in the 1960s I remember all of us had to move from New Amsterdam, back to our Indian environment, because of race riots. I remember all of us packing up everything that we had in New Amsterdam and getting on a bus and going back to the Indian villages in rural Berbice.

How old were you then?

I was about seven or eight. I was very conscious of being surrounded by our belongings, of people whispering and being afraid of what would happen to them. These were Indian people, getting on the bus and arriving in a village and spending three months there. In other words, one's nascent sense of Indianness was intensified by this experience of racial hostility. It didn't mean that I could speak a word of Hindi, although my grandmother and my great grandmother could. The whole environment was one of cows and wooden houses propped on stilts, and agricultural patterns of living. My uncle used to live in a mud hut, and owned a couple of cows and sheep. People dressed with malas on their heads and big silver bracelets. They were bare-

footed. This was my sense of Indianness, and it was intensified and contradicted by watching Indian films. We thought of India as being glorious, full of wealth and opulence, of people and palaces, instead of mud huts.

Where exactly was your village?

It was a village called Brighton, on the Corentyne coast. We stayed there for about three months until the riots were over. Then we went back to New Amsterdam. There was always constant journeying back to Brighton village. Every three months, during the short holidays, we went back to Brighton village – that's where most of my family were. In the Caribbean you always return to your grandmother's house.

How long were you at school in New Amsterdam?

Until I was about ten. Then I got a scholarship to Queen's College, Georgetown, the capital city. I was there for about two years.

Did you have family in Georgetown?

No, I boarded with people. This was a very important experience for me. There was a very bright Indian boy called Bacchus who was my very good friend in New Amsterdam. We both got scholarships to Queen's College, and went off to Georgetown and boarded separately; but, bright as he was, he could not afford to live in Georgetown, and had to give up the scholarship. That disappointment demolished him. About four years later he had a chance to emigrate illegally. He went to Canada to start a new life, but someone reported him and he had to go back home. When I saw him five years ago in Guyana, he had turned Christian. After preliminary greetings he said: 'Are you saved?' That question meant that our whole boyhood had disappeared: because of poverty, migration, and the racism in Guyanese society. Although his family were Moslems, he grasped the last straw left to him which was evangelical Christianity. He even joined the People's National Congress which has ruled and ruined Guyana continuously for twenty-six years already.

When and how did you come to England?

In 1969. My father had separated from my mother and he came to England to make his fortune, as many other West Indians had done.

When he made sufficient of his fortune, he sent for us. An elder sister came, then me, and then a younger sister.

Then you went to school here, and on to University?

I went to Cambridge.

And then you went to do a Ph.D. at London University in 18th century literature and art. You were also a post-doctoral Fellow at Oxford, and I believe, Yale?

Yes, I spent three years at Oxford and a brief time at Yale.

Where does your writing come in? What are the beginnings?

There were two people who were very influential in my writing career. One is an old black man called Mr. Spencer, who was headmaster in my primary school in New Amsterdam. He was really important to me in terms of wanting to achieve things. He had been abroad and he would tell us stories of how things were done abroad. So at a very early age he planted in my mind the idea that I had to go abroad to see how things were done. He pushed me, as he pushed many others to scholarships etc. The other person taught me at Queen's College – John Rickford, who is now a Professor at Stanford University. He was the head boy, and he got a scholarship to America to do his degree. He was such a brilliant debater and a wonderful teacher. He made us set up a newspaper with stencils to type, and gave us stories to write. If we wrote a good story or poem, he would let us read it out in front of the class. So he was an extremely creative teacher who inspired us all to write. He had asked us to write a story about a day in the life of a frog, and I had written one of the nicest stories. He read it out to the class. That gave me an audience for the first time, and the pleasure has stayed with me.

Those were the two main influences in your life, that you can recall?

The most important influence of all was my whole family – who saw education as absolutely important and urged me to achieve. I was lucky in that one of my uncles had already gone to Oxford – straight from the bush. He grew up in Brighton village – went to school there, then to Berbice High School, where he got a scholarship to Queen's College. He did his 'A' levels and went on to the University of the West Indies where he got a first-class honours in History. This was all in the late

'50s, early '60s. He then went on to study for his doctorate at Oxford. So there was already someone in the family who had ventured out, all the way from Brighton village to Oxford. Therefore, I grew up under that influence all the time. Uncle Raja was a little god figure to us. So apart from the outsiders there was also the importance of education in the family.

You felt inspired by the memory of your uncle having achieved things.

Yes. When I went back in 1976 to Brighton village, I saw some of the books that he read for 'A' levels, when he was seventeen, for example, Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination*. I was in my second year at Cambridge before I came across Trilling. Guyanese of this time were far more advanced than we were. What rather saddens me is that under this P.N.C. Government that we have had for so long, although we had the reputation of being the intellectuals and writers of the Caribbean, we Guyanese are now statistically at the very bottom of all the examination leagues in the Caribbean. That is the greatest indictment against this government: they have not just impoverished the people economically, they have impoverished their capacity for expression.

Is Slave Song your first book? I assume by that time you had already written your Ph.D. thesis.

No, I hadn't written my thesis then. *Slave Song* was written when I was at Cambridge. I was about twenty or twenty one, still an undergraduate. It was published six years later in 1984.

When you say 'written' do you mean in the form in which it finally appeared?

I had written four or five of the poems in *Slave Song* while I was an undergraduate at Cambridge. Whilst I was an undergraduate I had the chance to return home. It had been about ten years since I had been home. Leaving as a boy and going back as an adult was probably the most creative process that I've been through. I spent three months at home as an adult, and I had gone back with an apparatus of texts. I had also gone back with Western modes of behaviour as well as modes of reading, and I think the tension between the home environment and the Cambridge environment just created poetry. I immersed myself in that atmosphere for three months, and I found that going back to Cambridge released an enormous amount of creative energy. It reminds me of what C.L.R. James says about West Indians: we have the privilege of being insiders as regards English society, but we are also outsiders.

It is the same with our homes, our own villages: we are insiders and also outsiders, and it's that tension of being both insiders and outsiders that makes for excitement.

Did the poems in Slave Song come in exactly their final form, or were they changed much afterwards?

They were written in the form that they are at the moment, but obviously they were revised and shaped as they were being written.

And what about the notes that followed?

I thought of three things in writing an extensive introduction and a series of notes: it was a literary joke – hence I referred twice in *Slave Song* to T.S. Eliot, because Eliot had also joked and provided a kind of spoof gloss to *The Waste Land*. On another level, we had been arguing for a long time that Creole was a distinctive language. We made a lot of politics out of that. It was part of the nationalism in the 60s. We had our own airline, environment, landscape, and fruits, so we should have our own language. If we were going to take that seriously we should provide translations to our poems. But the third reason is the most serious. I wanted to write in a minimalist fashion, and I wanted to question the relationship between the work of art and the critical industry that arises because of that work of art. In other words, I was being the critic and the artist together in one book. It was in the '70s when I went to Cambridge that modern critical theory – structuralism and deconstruction – was taking root. Art was being eclipsed altogether. Therefore I was engaged in that whole Cambridge mood where the artist was being eclipsed and the critic became re-writer of art. That book came out of the intellectual environment of Cambridge; but it was also obviously nourished by the Guyanese imagination. It was a deliberately conscious work of literary criticism. It posed the question, which is so central now with Derrida and others, as to the relationship between the artist the critic, the creative work and the critical work.

What do you think would have happened if those notes and translations were not there?

I think the notes and translations take the poems into the realms of prose – very fine, elegant English prose. This throws up questions about the relationship between the prosaic nature of the English language and the intense, rhythmic nature of Creole. I see *Slave Song* as a whole book. It is the book of poems, but it is also a book with literary

criticism in it. I don't see how you can separate the two. I'm glad that Wilson Harris, in his review of the book, actually pointed out that it is the juxtaposition of the prose and poetry that creates an added dimension of excitement. If you like, it's mixed media. You have poetry and paintings. Well this is poetry and literary criticism.

I wonder about matters of audience. Obviously, English readers would respond more warmly to this mixed media presentation because it includes explanation and interpretation, and it is therefore easier to follow. But don't you run the risk of the West Indian reader being put off a little, perhaps even being irritated by the fact that he can understand the Creole language directly, yet he has to face the intrusion of the explanation and interpretation?

I don't think so for two reasons. I see that Brathwaite, in *X Self*, has followed me in providing a series of extensive notes even though he has abbreviated them. I think that *Slave Song* did have an impact. Don't forget that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this kind of writing was not unusual: you had poetry but also extensive introductions. In Pope's case, for instance, he supplied massive notes to his already extensive footnotes. Pope's own introduction to his poetry tends to be very detailed, and he also footnoted his own poetry. Now I'm not saying that we have to go back to the eighteenth century. What I'm saying is that it has influenced people like Brathwaite, whether they wish to acknowledge it or not, in terms of how they present their own poetry to the West. More importantly, I do not think that our own people, because we happen to be West Indians, understand our own language, or indeed the nuances, or evocations of our language. Just because you can speak a language doesn't mean you can inhabit it creatively and intellectually. I think West Indians will benefit from the notes, if they benefit at all, or they will benefit as much as the English. The notes leave off from the poems at a certain stage and then they just take off in their own direction. They are little prose pieces by themselves.

I found the sexuality of the poems very interesting. I was particularly interested in what you call 'the erotic energies of the colonial experience'.

Well I think that the Empire has been looked at from the perspective of sociology, history, political economy et cetera; but the Empire was also an enormous erotic project. What I was interested in was bringing to the surface the latent eroticism of the encounter between black and white, because it seemed to me that that would be revealing a relatively unexplored aspect of imperial relations. I know that Vic Reid had written a book on the Mau Mau called *The Leopard* which looked at this

matter. But it was sensational. It wasn't playful enough. What I did with my re-formation of the eroticism of plantation life was in fact to contextualize it in English medieval traditions of romantic expression. So that you get a Creole poem that quotes the ballad tradition of medieval poetry. One has to be playful with the potentiality of eroticism, otherwise one can get into a very ugly and sensational way of writing. So I 'distanced' myself from the eroticism by overlaying the poems with references outside the plantation experience.

You leave me somewhat confused about the exact object of this erotic type of writing. As you say, writing about colonialism has traditionally brought out aspects of economic exploitation, and of the enormous physical abuse of slavery, and so on. I am a little confused about the playful treatment of the erotic aspect of writing poetry.

First of all one has to say, the pure delight of writing in Creole about erotic experiences is a very sensuous pursuit. Also, you strip away the surfaces of colonial relations to reveal what takes place at the basest level of human emotions and actions. In the same way *Heart of Darkness* ceased being an exploration of a different geography and landscape, and became a Freudian exploration of the energies that people exchange. In other words Africa ceases to be a geographical entity and becomes the territory of the human sub-conscious. Now that is revealing something else about our colonial relations. I think also that it was linguistically important. I was a bit disappointed in a lot of Creole poetry, including my own and Brathwaite's, because I felt that the poets were largely using the Creole in a social realist manner, without a sense of its psychic energy and disturbing quality. They didn't take the Creole to the very edge of breakdown because they didn't have the themes, and unless you stretch a language to its very limits in the way that Salman Rushdie is stretching the English language at the moment, you cannot see the full potentiality of the language. Now the theme that I had which was eroticism allowed me to adventure with the language and to 'pervert' the language, as opposed to Eddie Brathwaite's desire to 'purify' the language.

You speak of the vulgarity of the language and of pushing it to breaking point. You also mention exploring the extremities of language. I would have thought that that was exactly what Brathwaite has done: to mix Creole with standard English, and marry that mixture with music. So in fact he was pushing beyond linguistic borders into the realm of another medium – music.

Brathwaite's project was absolutely innovative and he's the best poet we've got. But at the end of the day, his Creole is still what I would call 'polite'. It still works within boundaries, and it isn't until you take the language to the very edge of the boundaries of expression that you really see its potential for literature. I think Brathwaite was absolutely important in validating the use of Creole. He is superb in the way that he marries Creole with standard English and imposes a jazz rhythm onto that, but even that is still conventional, it is not adventurous in a literary way. It worked within a limited context and has a limited achievement. You have to use language as Joyce does, as Rushdie, or as Lawrence tore and perverted the language in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. In other words, you have to take the language far ahead of descriptions of social conditions, or indeed of the intellectual projects which seek to marry say standard English with Creole and jazz. That is still a very intellectual project, and it can betray an absence of feeling for Creole. I think that Brathwaite's poetry, paradoxically, has a feeling for the Creole language; but it doesn't possess the language instinctively. His reputation is partly based on the use of Creole, but if you look carefully, he cannot feel that language in depth in the way that Wilson Harris can. Harris had creolized the English language from a different perspective. This is why people say they find it difficult to understand Harris: he has creolized the English language, confused all the clauses, let the sentences run on endlessly. He has stretched and pulled the language everywhere; I don't think Brathwaite has done that. This is an enormous charge to make against a major literary figure, also a major black literary figure whose Creole has always been seen as a province for the expression of black things. I am of Indian stock. I am not re-colonising Creole; neither do I want to appropriate it. It is, or used to be, my language, and the language of my family.

There is tension between Indo- and Afro-West Indians in Guyana and Trinidad. Do you think this tension is represented in the language spoken by either group? Are there significant differences between the Creole of Indo- West Indians and the Creole spoken by Afro- West Indians?

Brathwaite did make a call a few years back for people to start researching into the Indian contributions to the creolization of language in the Caribbean, because all the research is really about the survival of African retentions, and I would hope that what *Slave Song* does is to show how Indian the Creole is, not just in the use of Indian diction – there are many Indian words like 'chamar', 'belna', 'pookne' – but also in the whole setting of cows, and houses on stilts, and savannahs and paddy fields. That agricultural experience is very Indian, and it is

arrogant to marginalize us, to think that we can be on the land, day in and day out, since 1838, and not feel for that land and not belong to that land. You see when you are in the city you don't belong anywhere because you are metropolitan. You are marginal. It is those city based populations in the West Indies that are the most marginal people. They are the non-West Indians, for they have imbibed all the metropolitan values. We who cut cane and grow rice and get bitten by snakes, are the West Indians who inhabit the spirit of the land, certainly in Guyana. I can't speak for Jamaica and other places where agriculture was sustained by non-Indian traditions.

Roy Heath has also spoken of the urban experience reducing people to a sameness like other urban experiences. Its very title Slave Song encourages me to think about the Afro experience of slavery in the Caribbean, and there are some poems about slavery and master-slave relationships in the book. But the poems which leap at me as most deeply inspired are the Indian poems. I realize that this has come about because of a specific historical context in which African slavery and the plantation system created an environment into which Indo-Caribbean experiences were fitted.

To describe the Indian experience you really have to start with that parent experience if you like, or you have to acknowledge, or fix it. In other words, what I was trying to do in *Slave Song* was to see a continuum of slave and indenture experience.

Is it not dangerous to speak of different Caribbean experiences if one set of people suffered more than another set?

If I am writing about an Indian on a plantation, I will inevitably also convey echoes of the African on the plantation. But if Afro-Caribbean experience is only an echo in my work, it doesn't mean that I am marginalizing the African. It just means that my theme is Indian. There are echoes of Africa always in writing about the Caribbean plantation, but they're becoming more and more inaudible because the African has moved away so far and so fast from plantation life, certainly in Guyana, that the African presence is probably an intellectual memory now.

When V.S. Naipaul produced A House for Mr. Biswas, he was attacked for being ethnocentric, and he defended himself by saying that Trinidad Indian experience was all that he knew. There is no doubt that this experience was conditioned by such factors as displacement, exploitation and alienation, which also influenced Afro-Caribbean experience. But he had to write about what he knew. For this reason, it is not hard to understand why the strength of your

inspiration is in your Indian-based poems. Perhaps it is for the same reason that I was very impressed by the success of your novel, *The Intended*, in capturing the context of Indian life in the Caribbean. I don't think previous writers have captured quite the same mixture of drunkenness, wife-beating, violence, aspiration and economic cunning. Having the access to raw Guyanese Indian experience which you have reproduced so well, are you now to be considered a Black British writer of a West Indian, or a Guyanese Indian writing in England? In passages, for instance, where you interpret the contradictions between Caribbean and British experience, or the person caught in that contradiction – you are superb.

Writers are privileged when they have a variety of sources to draw from, for example, a variety of landscapes that they have lived in, sometimes partially, or in a variety of languages they have spoken, even though they may overlap, like Creole and English. Writers are absolutely privileged to have this kind of plural, complex, contradictory, background. Art is nourished by paradox. So in terms of self-definition I am glad I'm, if you like, a three of four footed creature, a kind of latter day Anancy as many West Indians are, a spider figure with certainly one foot planted in Africa through my scholarship which was really about the representation of Africans in Western Art and Literature. Intellectually, I have a foot planted in Africa. I certainly have one foot planted in India in an equally ambiguous way, because I can only re-capture India in an intellectual way through books, or by visiting Indian friends. Because I am Indo-Guyanese I am already removed from India. And certainly one foot is planted in Europe because, as C.L.R. James says, we are very much created by Europe, not wholly but partially: we grew up with Shakespeare, we see the English countryside as Naipaul does in *The Enigma of Arrival*, through the lens of Constable and Wordsworth. We can't just have a direct relationship with the English countryside. We must see it through the literary or visual text. So we've got a foot planted in Europe, and then we have a foot planted in our own society, Guyana, and Guyana has its own foot planted in South America. So it is potentially an endless series of poetic feet, landscapes, modes of feeling and thinking, and experiences that are available to us. We should see it as such a privilege. Instead, we see it as a grievance. Historically, some West Indians have said 'Oh God, why can't we go back to Africa? Why can't we go back to India?' To me that is a negation of the imagination, or the sign of an impoverished imagination, an atavistic impulse. It is refusing to see that we are modern people in the sense of having the potential for living in complex states. But we refuse to be complex. This is why in England we set up silly little political parties, or we fall back on narrow

nationalisms like the Monsteratt Association, the Barbados Association, the Trinidad Association. When we are not terrified of our complexities, we turn them into a source of grievance.

Historically, they have been a source of grievance.

I think they have been a source of grievance, but I also think that paradoxically the middle passage was profoundly creative. It wasn't meant to be creative, but by removing the African and Indian from home it set up all kinds of tensions. Diaspora set up all kinds of tensions and possibilities for growth. The middle passage was creative, by liberating the imagination from home. Writers have to live outside before they can write about inside; you need that distance. The middle passage gave us a distance from Africa and India. But also it liberated us physically as well. I lost all sense of caste affiliation. I would not have lost that if the British had not moved us to the Caribbean. I would have been possibly a peasant labouring under one of the most oppressive systems on earth, which is the caste system.

You lost your caste but you also lost your language.

We lost our language, and it is an irreparable loss. It's a very felt loss to me. I've always wanted to learn Hindi or Urdu. But you have to take what you have.

I accept that the complexity of the Caribbean experience may include certain benefits. But living here in England as an Indian-looking person, without an Indian language, are you not at a disadvantage when you are subjected to racism for example? Would it not be an advantage to have a language other than English to express your difference?

Yes, but I think I can try to express my difference using the English language. All I'm saying is that if I had Hindi with the same fluency that I have English, then I would have felt more strengthened, more whole. But possibly even more boxed in, because in a sense only having the English language to express my difference means that I have to be so fantastically creative with the English language. I have to do things with the English language that maybe it doesn't have the 'natural' capacity for. The English language does not readily allow me to express my Guyanese experience. I have to force the weight of my experience on it and therefore modify the language. New challenges arise out of being trapped in mono-language and having to express differences in

it. That in itself creates wonderful tensions that can be exploited by the writer.

You're speaking of literary advantages.

Yes, but I see myself as having the protection of a creative imagination. I draw a distinction between the artist and the immigrant. If I didn't have art, then I would be an immigrant, and I would have nothing to console me in this society which, as you say, is so racist.

You don't live here as an isolated artist, you live among people like yourself: what is your responsibility to these people who look like yourself, but don't have the literary advantages to express themselves creatively in the English language, and have to go out and suffer from English racism?

But the artist has to go out there and suffer the same. I have to wait at bus stops, and sit on trains. The Whites don't know that I am an artist, and they don't necessarily care anyway, so I am treated like other immigrants in this society, in certain situations, that is. When I speak of the 'protection of the creative imagination', I mean an awareness of, or confidence in self, which means you can speak out, or write out. But you have to see all these things in context. I come from a society, Guyana which is as racist and traumatised by race, perhaps more traumatised than British society. Even if we argue, as some historians have, that it was the British who created racism in the Caribbean, I was born into a racist society, one in which race was a very important and privileged factor. Coming here, in fact, for me has been as liberating as it has been oppressive. There has been a deep liberal mood in Britain from Magna Carta Days to today. The British initiated and participated in the slave trade. At the same time, abolition of the slave trade was the first major philanthropic movement in this country. So whilst there is illiberalism, there has always been a liberal mood, and we have to exist in that liberal mood. So I wouldn't dismiss England as a racist society. That is too simplistic. It is racist, but it also has anti-racist elements, and it is our responsibility as immigrant writers to support, sustain and contribute to the anti-racist elements, by helping to develop the society as a whole, and by contributing our arts and sciences, education and business skills and whatever else to the society; for this is our home.

So the future is here?

There is no other future – the discernible future is in Britain. This is home now, and we have to make it home. I am not arguing for indiscriminate integration, or for loss of the cultural baggage that we brought with us to this country. What I am arguing for is our contribution to all aspects of society, even bearing with us a sense of our difference. And I do believe that England is spacious enough to tolerate difference in the society; it is big enough to want difference. In the West Indies, in those tiny little islands, if you are different you are a lunatic; you are ostracized, and called an artist or a madman. That is why Naipaul's fiction is so full of different people called 'mad'. In this society you have greater allowance to be 'mad'. This society is much more liberal than our own society. When we riot in England, sometimes for very good reason, it is also a refusal to contribute to society. Riots are as negative as they are inevitable.

That's realistic. Whatever the colonial past, it has happened already. People who have come here must accommodate themselves to conditions here. I agree with you. And whereas I am aware of racism in this society, I think you are right to acknowledge anti-racist and liberal elements working against it.

I also agree with E.P. Thompson who said that there have always been common decencies operating between people in England. People might be racist in a philosophical or abstract sense. They might talk about Pakis in the abstract sense, but if they sit down side by side in a bus, or if they encounter a Paki in the street, in some personal way, the racism diminishes, it is not as intense or as overt as you might think it would be.

I agree these prejudices stem from an intellectual dislike produced by historical factors which are themselves the product of narrow and ignorant attitudes about other cultures. There is the commitment to the normal, social exchanges.

That's at one level. At another level this is a society of books. It's a textual and artistic society. It's a contradiction to say that a society of books is a society of hatred: it has its hatreds, but it also has its books.

You sound like V.S. Naipaul in the early days when he first came to England and encountered civilized social decencies which he had not experienced at home in Trinidad.

I wouldn't say that I never experienced it at home, because I've experienced great acts of generosity in both societies.

But the generosity at home is more personal.

Yes, it is more personal and family based whereas the generosity here is much more social. We just have to have the confidence and courage to keep saying that this is our society, even if a lot of white people say it is not. We must keep saying it is our society, and believing it not only in the abstract, but in the way that the Indians and Asians coming from Uganda and Kenya in the 60s with all the 'disadvantages' of an alien language, alien foods and ways of dressing nevertheless made enormous waves in the cities, and created businesses that are now major employers in Britain. We West Indians can learn from the Asians. It seems to me a tragedy that Indians have become alienated in the West Indies. What Indians did to the Caribbean was quite revolutionary. In spite of conditions of indenture they brought a sense of voluntary labour, the feeling that labour gains rewards. Up to 1838 labour did not bring rewards in the West Indies, because the people were slaves. We brought back the work ethic into the West Indies. Why is it that we don't have a major publishing house in the West Indies? That shows you how impoverished we are as a region. So there's an ambiguity in West Indians attacking England. We ourselves can be incomplete, certainly in Guyana's case. We don't even have our own publishing house to give expression to our writers and teachers. It is because we spend our money on our army as a way of stemming the political fury, that we are so backward and incompetent. We have messed up our own society. It's not enough to blame the white man for messing up our society. He may have introduced the elements of mess, but we completed that job with superb finality. That is why everyone in Guyana wants to leave.

In defence, I can say that, in the twenty-five years or so since the white man formally left, the structures of colonialism have remained in place in social and economic terms.

All over the Caribbean we had the middle-classes inhabiting positions that the white man had vacated, and behaving just like the white man at his worst. I think that the scholarship of Clive Thomas and other economic analysts in the region shows that we lost economic markets, not because these markets were dominated by the West, but because we didn't have the capacity to fulfil them. LOME under the EC convention guarantees that they will purchase our sugar. But we cannot produce that sugar. Why? Because of administrative and ultimately political incompetence.

Let us get back to literature, and your novel The Intended. I think it is a very successful novel with much love, sex, and everything. It has an authentic sense of Guyanese life. But how does the structure work? Is there a pattern or significance in the relationship of the Guyanese sections and the English ones?

The narrative structure of the novel has no focal point. It's an unstable narrative. I think that one has to exploit the creativity inherent in creolization, by which I mean that there is a confusion of the past, present and future tenses in the Creole language, and I wanted to exploit the space that that confusion offers. So there is no linear narrative in the novel, even though there is a certain direction to the constant flashbacks and flashforwards. Now that flashback and flashforward are related to one's linguistic condition – the Creole with its confused tenses. I also wanted to convey the immigrant experience which is not linear, because immigrants are liable to appear and disappear. This is what migrant life is: you appear in one society, then you disappear; you are either deported or move on somewhere else; you are always moving on. That's the structure. It's set on buses and trains, and there is a lot of waiting at bus-stops, a constant sense of travelling which ends up with a boy waiting for a taxi. There are taxis, buses, planes and trains which represent the constant affliction as well as the creative potential of migration or diaspora. So there is a kind of intellectual migration going on as well. The main character migrates to England, but in England he migrates away from his friends.

You have a very good passage on that. I think it was the hero reflecting on the British security and his insecurity, and the mixture of feelings that produces.

I didn't want to get involved in the parade of grievances. One of the old themes in West Indian literature is the crisis of identity. I have a multiple identity. There is no crisis. There is a kind of delight as well as a kind of an anguish in jumping from one identity to the next. It's like electrons which have their own energization circles. Sometimes they jump from one to the next and release an enormous amount of energy; then they jump back to another circle: little elections jumping. That is not a crisis. That is delight and poignancy, and hopefully a release of energy. To see it as a crisis would be to invest in historical grievances. To call myself black, and to hate the white is to get back to manichean systems of operating in the world. It seems to me that our West Indian writers have invested too heavily in the monolith of 'the folk'. This is not true for Wilson Harris and V.S. Naipaul who came from different

positions, one cynical and the other Blakean, yet both making the West Indian feel that he is on the threshold of some capacity.

It is interesting that the names of Naipaul and Harris have recurred throughout this interview. But Harris can be so remote. His writing is not very accessible. How is it that he is so influential?

I think Harris's ideas are very stubborn, and ideas have to be converted into art. Lawrence said that the business of the novelist is to reconcile his metaphysics with his actual sense of living. I think that Harris does this brilliantly at times when you get the most sensuous passages about Guyana and the Guyanese landscape. But then sometimes, there is the sudden loss of that sensuousness and there is a struggle for the formulation of philosophical ideas which ought to belong in an essay rather than a work of art. I think that when he succeeds there is nothing like it in West Indian literature. There are sudden ideas which emerge out of what he calls a half eclipse. In the middle of a novel an idea will surface, or a few sentences will be thrown up which will suddenly open up a whole new way of seeing things. These fantastic illuminations always come with Harris. The prose is always being illuminated although it is so dark and dense at times.

We used to talk about the fragmentation of colonialism and now this is being interpreted in a more positive way as multiplicity. It is as if the old fragments can now nourish each other in loose association rather than remain broken or useless as in the previous interpretation. Does Harris's work reflect this positive interpretation of multiplicity? Was that there from the very first book Palace of the Peacock?

I think Harris has seen, in the deepest, most uncanny way, the potential of this fragmentation or multiplicity. All his novels really are about a kind of quantum imagination, as Michael Gilkes calls it, where there are no physical laws that are rigid. There are no identities which cannot be transferred or modified. This is what he struggles to convey in his novels. Whether he succeeds is another matter. I think he does mostly. All art fails ultimately, or fails at critical times. At least Harris has taken a different position from Naipaul. Naipaul's position strikes me at times as being similar to that of Negritude, in searching for a stable community or a stable set of ideas. The search for stability is always in Naipaul. To me that can show an unwillingness to adventure into realms of anarchy and confusion which is the modern condition, which is why Naipaul always seems so magnificent, so 19th century in the impeccable, chiselled nature of his prose. His writing seems so colonial

as opposed to post-colonial. Post-colonial writing is one of confusion. It has thrown up its own literary form of 'magical realism'. Naipaul does not see in the confusion the possibility of a new re-grouping of citizenship. He doesn't see in the babel of languages which exist in London, the possibility of a new language emerging or indeed old languages co-existing within the babel. Why does Babel have to fall down? Still, I would agree with Enoch Powell, whose position in politics seems similar to Naipaul's in literature, and I think to Brathwaite's in his poetry, namely that you must have boundaries. All this revelling and confusion can, at one level, mean an enormous loss of the self or self-confidence. In other words, you cannot be cultural unless you have a sense of boundaries. Now Brathwaite drew African boundaries in the Caribbean, and Naipaul shows the terror of an absence of boundaries. Harris, it seems to me, revels in the absence of boundaries, and that can be very dangerous. It can mean that you are a dilettante, that you are loose and have no roots or attachment or commitment. But I do hope that I can be intensely Guyanese, or intensely Barbican, or English, or European. In other words, one has the possibilities of inhabiting different masks intensely. I'm not just saying, take one mask, put it on, throw it away, then take another one and throw it away.

This is a protean vision of something being broken and remade constantly, something in which a process of dissolution and regeneration is always active.

The amoeba never breaks its boundaries, it always has a skin, a shell. You always have the nucleus of your soul.

From the very beginning Harris always talked about that singularity, that unity within diversity. There is always a nucleus.

Sometimes the nucleus shifts within the body of the amoeba, but the nucleus is always there, and there is always a skin or boundary.

So that the person is still whole. The self is still whole.

Lamming sees the skin as a castle of skin. He would see colonials constructing their skin out of stone. But stone is not fluid. You can either just obey stone or you can crumble and destroy it. I prefer to think that the boundary of your skin is not immovable or made out of stone. It is not something that you have to blow trumpets at and smash down like the walls of Jericho. It's amoeboid.

Excerpt from *The Intended*

Whenever he came to my room, he no longer scrutinized the wallpaper or floor for evidence of stains and dirt. What used to be quick, hostile visits, ameliorated only by my handing over the rent, became leisurely affairs: Mr Ali, face drawn, eyes softened with grief, sitting on my bed talking endlessly about his family. The thickness of his accent and his frequent lapses into Urdu meant it was difficult to follow him, but I was a model of patience, listening intently, nodding sympathetically, breaking out with the odd apostrophe as if his suffering was also mine. Although largely bored by his stories, I affected an interest since it put him under an obligation to me. For the first time I had some control over him, so that I could negotiate late payment of the rent because I had spent some of it on food or a book that week.

His sister, apparently, had been sick for a year; no one knew why. A widow, she lived with her childless sister and brother-in-law in a remote village, the three of them growing old together, scraping a living by collecting fire-wood and selling it to the villagers. This accounted for her stoop, for she had spent the last twenty-five years bending to pick up pieces of wood. Mr Ali, thousands of miles away in London, was the family's saviour, he sent ten pounds home regularly (my rent money) – enough to feed the three of them for the month. When he heard about her illness he posted an extra ten pounds with which they took her to the nearest doctor, some thirty miles away by bus. The doctor took the ten pounds, examined her, drew blood, inspected it under a microscope, tested her urine sample and finally pronounced her merely fatigued by old age. He gave her a capsule containing about ten differently coloured pills, each of them slightly mildewed, then sent her away. She took ten days rest and one pill a day, at the end of which she felt strong again, getting up on the eleventh day from her bed to collect firewood. On the twelfth day, the same pains started again and continued until Mr Ali sent, three months later, an air ticket so that she could travel to England to rest, eat good food and be looked after by Mrs Ali.

She was my companion in the late hours when she would come upstairs to the toilet adjoining my room and spend an hour there

coughing and vomiting. I was awakened by the violence of each upheaval and the groans that followed. I pushed open the toilet door to see her leaning against the wall, dazed and weakened. 'Are you all right?' I asked impotently. She looked at me and summoned up a few words in Urdu. I brought her a glass of water, not knowing what else to do. She took it in her frail hand and swallowed, some of the water running down her mouth and neck. I went away, but could not sleep, feeling the pain in her body and my utter inability to comfort her. Each night, just after midnight, she hauled herself upstairs to the toilet to vomit, and in the intervals I offered her water, orange juice or milk. I always held her hand, and supported her as she returned to her bed. No words passed between us, but a dependency developed as between mother and son, the dying and the living. I stopped going to bed at midnight, reading late into the night, waiting for the sound of footsteps creaking the stairs. I needed her to come upstairs, to continue the relationship, and missed her on those few occasions when she broke the routine, lying awake in my bed wondering desperately whether she had died. Mr Ali was extremely grateful for my late-night vigilance. Whereas previously he had chided me for staying up late and urging me to stop reading and go to bed to save on his electricity bill, now he positively encouraged my studies. I no longer had to contemplate candles, or an oil lamp such as lit the house of my grandmother in Albion Village, to finish off essays. I began to feel sorry for him as I watched his spirit crumbling, his old character of parsimony and bullying undermined by his sister's sickness.

'All for nothing, all this for nothing,' he said on a visit to my room the night after his sister was taken to hospital by ambulance. It was about eight in the evening, I was just about to sit down to eat some food when there was a sudden commotion downstairs, doors opening and slamming and Mrs Ali shouting at the top of her voice. After a few minutes the doorbell rang. I peeped out of my door to see two men in blue uniforms enter, bearing a stretcher. I rushed downstairs, following them into the living-room, where the sister lay crumpled in a ball of bloodied clothing, breathing heavily, moaning. They put her on the stretcher whilst Mrs Ali rushed around, collecting things in a bag, a towel, sari, toothbrush, and Mr Ali stood by the door immobilized by grief and watched them take her out and slide her into the ambulance. As she left through the front door, she looked up, recognized me, tried to raise her hand as if to signal something, to say something, but the men were in a hurry, they put her hand back under the blanket and silenced her with a 'There! there! you'll be all right dear! There's a good girl, don't wear yourself out, we'll soon get you back on your feet,' whilst I looked into her eyes and smiled weakly as

if to reassure her that the two strangers were kindly and at the same time telling her goodbye forever.

'All this for nothing,' he repeated in a mournful voice, gesturing to the walls, the ceiling, the floor. 'Twelve years I come here, work, save, work, buy house, paint, put new window in, new roof, dig up garden, plant vegetables like back home, like farming, all come to nothing.' It was Friday, rent day, but he had come up to mourn not to collect his dues. When I took out the ten pound note and gave it to him, he held it for a moment, then put it down on the table. 'Money no good for me now, nothing,' he said, obsessed by his sister's illness. He looked at my feet. 'Buy new shoe, how can you walk down road with thing like that?' and he put the note in my hand, his face suddenly glowing with kindness and friendship. 'How your mother and father don't pity you and send things for you?' he asked. He suddenly wanted to find out about my family, as if to drown his own sense of doom.

'What you want to do when you leave school?' he wanted to know.

'Go to university, become a doctor, or a lawyer.'

'Then what?'

'I'm not sure ... help people, make money, buy a car, buy a house, get married.' He listened intently as I sketched a vague future.

'Then what?'

There was a long silence in which I tried to imagine the substance of life to come whilst he drifted off into thoughts about his sister's coming death, the funeral arrangements, the gathering of the family, the telephone calls, telegrams, the burial in Balham Cemetery, the drugged sleeping that night and the waking up to horrible cold sunlight, to the echoes of yesterday's prayers and the ritual of shaving, brushing, dressing in mournful clothes to visit the grave for months to come, stopping in at the florists at the top of the road for a fresh wreath, boarding the train and bearing your distress in total privacy in the crowded compartment, unfamiliar people reading newspapers, books, chewing sweets, chatting, no one knowing, and you boxed in your own grief, like a coffin. You look around and wonder how many have felt the same, have suffered the loss or are about to and you want to reach out to them, to share something, you don't know exactly what, and to say something which even in your broken English and Paki accent would touch them and inspire responses. Of course you don't. Instead you sit there wedged between strangers, looking at your hands, your feet, fingering your tie, until the train disgorges you onto the platform, all the time wondering why we must live as we die, alone, by ourselves. A bus takes you to the cemetery, which is packed with graves, thousands of headstones and concrete mounds, each marking the spot of someone whom you're never seen and never will and each a

stranger to the body beside them. You come to your portion of this vast unknown earth where your sister lies, and spend an hour there crying to yourself, arranging flowers, reading the English words on the headstone for the hundredth time, by now totally fluent in the deciphering of the words.

I fancied that my own immortality was secured by the verse on her tombstone for when Mr Ali was faced with the problem of an appropriate inscription, it was me he approached to compose a set of words. 'Something that will last,' he said, 'tell her story, that people will forever see what my sister was, and my family.' Joseph's obsession with nothingness came back to me. It was puzzling to conceive how an illiterate peasant woman – draped in rags all her life, next to nothing, who could barely get a visa to enter England, coughing all over her entry forms and the immigration officer at Heathrow so that he moved back slightly from his pillar-shaped desk where he stood like a sentinel, still not escaping the thin spray of blood and spittle, and stamped her passport quickly to get rid of her unpleasant presence – was transformed by death, so that now she was moving freely above clouds, seeing with an astronaut's eye the eeriness of the earth beneath, the blue wash of ocean tides, the green and gold splashes of forests and deserts, the spread of land without boundaries except for gleaming rivers and mountains, and when she looked up, a billion lanterns hanging from the dome of space in a carnival of lights. All the mysteries which hurt our minds yielded up their secrets to her. The mathematics, physics, chemistry and geology of the whole universe she calculated in an instant, she who once could only count according to the number of fingers and toes, wrapping ten twigs at a time in string, each bundle to be sold for one rupee each. Now her all-seeing eye traced the hidden underground stream, found the ideal site for the village well, when before she and her brethren dug forlornly in the dust; she discovered a mine of diamond-laden rocks only half a mile from her hut, enough to buy wheat to feed the whole province for the rest of the century. And her mouth, shrivelled with age, barely consolidating some remaining teeth, could now utter the most fluent songs, could quote from a thousand books of literature at will, could speak innumerable languages. For a few daydreaming moments I envied her genius before it all became too foolish to contemplate and the echoes of her vomiting brought me down to earth. The house was silent now that she had gone and the nights lonely. Two weeks in hospital, a flurry of activities downstairs as Mr and Mrs Ali came and went with plastic bags stuffed with samosas, chapatis, fruit, clean clothing, until the telephone rang one afternoon and a cry broke from Mr Ali, a howl that dropped all pretence to civilization and surrendered to pure instinct. It was during a

commercial break, and I turned down the volume on the television and stared mindlessly at the screen, Mr Ali's grief imparting a desolation to the Andrex toilet rolls being advertised by a dog, followed by the meat that nine out of ten cats preferred. I was confused, no longer knowing what mattered. The programme was resumed, some politicians arguing with violent bias about the steep rise of inflation, its dire effects, the bottom dropping out of markets, the plunge into unemployment, loss of prestige, the nation falling apart – none of which mattered any more to Mr Ali who, seized by a sense of loneliness, sobbed automatically, almost objectively.



David Dabydeen

A Novelist at the Crossroad: Bessie Head's *A Bewitched Crossroad*

In *A Bewitched Crossroad*, Bessie Head combines the concerns of the historian with those of the novelist and fits a comprehensive account of social and political events in Southern Africa, in the nineteenth century into an artistically devised narrative. Despite her concern with social issues and with the communal destiny, Head displays the novelist's interest both as a historical document and as a literary experiment.

The idea of the crossroad as a meeting-place of divergent pathways is significant in the very structure of the work which looks both towards fiction and history and towards African and Western literary traditions. The antecedents of the form which Head utilizes in *A Bewitched Crossroad* include both the epic and romance of Western literary tradition and the heroic tales of African oral tradition. A major component of her narrative is, however, documented history. In *A Bewitched Crossroad*, Head has also brought together themes from her three novels, and, in particular, those themes which relate to the conflict between the forces of good and evil in human history and between the agents of local tradition and Western scientific and technological culture in colonial and ex-colonial African societies. When one remembers that Serowe (1981), the work which preceded *A Bewitched Crossroad*, is a documentary in which Head chose as her main theme 'social reform and educational progress'¹ in a Botswana village, one recognizes her last book as an attempt to integrate elements from different literary genres and to bring interests pulling her, as a writer, in different directions to a meeting point.

In *A Bewitched Crossroad*, Head covers the period 1800-1896, a period of major disruption in Southern Africa. She lifts the lid of the 'boiling cauldron'² of history to reveal societies in the process of transformation. Conflicts generated by clashes of material interests and codes of conduct, as well as by chance occurrences, are vividly recalled. The periods of chaos described are punctuated by periods of relative stability, a notable example being that of Khama III's rule over the Bamangwato from 1875 to 1923. Head gives a rapid outline of events among the

Bamangwato and surrounding societies up to the point at which Khama assumes leadership and focuses on the period 1875-1896. She takes the reader only as far as is necessary to suggest the emergence of a nation under Khama's guidance and to demonstrate Khama's achievement of the triumph of intellect over passion. Where many African writers have celebrated Shaka,³ Head projects Khama III, a leader who inclined toward non-violence. In *A Bewitched Crossroad*, Head thus returns to thematic concerns introduced in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, and further explored in *A Question of Power* - what path should the individual caught in a cycle of violence, or the society arrived at a turning-point in history, take.

Like the heroes and heroines of Head's novels, Khama III is depicted as an individual relying on personal moral choice rather than on custom to guide him. A connection with Makhaya, the hero of *When Rain Clouds Gather*, is indicated by the title *A Bewitched Crossroad*, for, in her first novel, Head repeatedly used the image of the person arrived at a crossroad and wondering which direction to take to represent Makhaya's situation.⁴ Like Makhaya, Khama rejects a narrow 'tribal' outlook in order to discover a way of life more relevant to the changed environment in which contact with the Europeans has placed him. Where Makhaya's concern was largely for himself as an individual, Khama's involves the fate of a nation.

Another theme to which the events described in *A Bewitched Crossroad* relate is that of political ambition. This theme is central to *Maru*. Clashes between Khama III and his brother Khamane which are recorded in *A Bewitched Crossroad* recall incidents in *Maru* where Head highlights quarrels about custom, precedence and the possession of a desired object. Like *Maru*, the hero of Head's second novel, Khama, at one point, renounces political ambition and lives as a private citizen. Later, when he assumes leadership of his people, Head shows him combining astute judgement with strong moral principles and displaying a subtlety in his dealings with others, similar to *Maru*'s. Like *Maru*, Khama aims 'to open up new worlds',⁵ this being, as the narrator in *A Bewitched Crossroad* implies, 'the greatest, the highest duty of mankind' (pp. 132-133).

In highlighting the themes of wandering and migration in *A Bewitched Crossroad*, Head also focuses on the problems which the individual opting out of one community faces in the process of adjusting to another. This was a major preoccupation in *A Question of Power* where Elizabeth, the heroine, is caught between aggressive personalities dominating her existence and forces pulling her in opposite directions. The analogy between the individual in a state of mental confusion and the society at the crossroads of history and uncertain what road to take is still

apparent in *A Bewitched Crossroad*, but the mood in this work is different. With the emphasis on the communal rather than the individual fate, events are viewed more from the perspective of myth where they appear cyclical and inevitable, rather than from that of the novel, which, despite the variety of its forms, projects the emotional experience and the immediate personal and social consequences of the actions of particular individuals.

Botswana, formerly British Bechuanaland, may be seen as a crossroad both geographically and historically. Encircled as it is by South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, it is a junction between territories which have followed divergent models of development. The Botswana model, which Head perceives as a continuation of that introduced by Khama III among the Bamangwato, also diverges from these. British Bechuanaland resisted a total take-over by European political and economic interests, despite the efforts of Englishmen like Cecil Rhodes who saw it as a useful corridor to Central Africa.

For the adventurers who failed to make the territory serve their purposes as a useful junction between two highly exploitable areas - the gold and diamond bearing fields of South Africa and the rich pasturelands of then Mashonaland, which was regarded by many as an African eldorado, British Bechuanaland was indeed 'bewitched' or mysteriously protected. Largely semi-desert, with a cattle-breeding industry which was uneconomic in the commercial environment created by the Europeans, and bordering on countries with potential for thriving industries, it seemed 'bewitched' in the opposite sense also, for in comparison with its more richly endowed neighbours it was 'cursed'. This recognition of the paradoxical elements in the situation and the history of the territory is brought out in the final paragraph of the narrative: 'The land eluded the colonial era. The forces of the scramble for Africa passed through it like a huge and destructive storm but a storm that passed on to other lands. It remained the black man's country. It was a bewitched crossroad. Each day the sun rose on a hallowed land' (p. 196). The poverty of the land ensured its territorial integrity.

Two Southern African societies are brought to the foreground of the narrative. These represent two different types of social organization, and their leaders two opposite ways of exercising power. At one pole are the Ndebele, warlike and violent, and, at the other, are the Bamangwato, who, under the leadership of Khama III, are learning to modify aggressive forms of behaviour and to channel their energies into the creation of a stable polity. The cruelties of the Ndebele leader Mzilikazi visited upon those who lay in his path on his push northwards after his break with Shaka have been highlighted in the popular tradition and the Ndebele are thus 'widely feared, hated and despised by all sur-

rounding nations' (p. 156). To many Africans, the advent of the Europeans is welcome, for the recent record of the Ndebele helps to mask the designs of the newcomers who seem to stand between oppressed African communities and 'the might and terror of Ndebele power' (p. 183). Many of those who flee from the control of the Ndebele turn to Khama III and are permitted to join his community. Khama's conduct is contrasted both with that of Mzilikazi and later with that of his son Lobengula who is Khama's more direct contemporary.

The focus from Chapter 4 of *A Bewitched Crossroad* onwards is on the Bamangwato coming together as a nation, 'a rising star in the heavens by virtue of the leadership of their famous chief Khama' (p. 62). In *Serowe* which records the programme of social and educational reform initiated by Khama and his son Tshekedi, Head emphasized the veneration in which both chiefs were held in their time and after. There must have been, however, dissentient voices. Head's introduction of the character Maruapula, in *A Bewitched Crossroad*, who suggests that some of Khama's reforms run counter to the secret desires of his people, indicates her recognition of undercurrents beneath an outwardly placid rule. Head shows Khama starting the Bamangwato on a new path, using selectively the ideas brought by the missionaries, and techniques for communication and social organization acquired from the Europeans to change institutions which, in his view, had been especially oppressive for the ordinary people or had contributed to some of the calamities of the past.

As in her novels, Head is not engaged in ideological debate or defending a particular political system or course of action. She searches for meaningful patterns within the rapid and often uncontrollable currents of recent history and their links with patterns in the past. The wider application of her theme is indicated on the very first page of the story when the narrator remarks of the Sebina clan, a splinter branch of the Baralong people who are setting out on a protracted period of wandering and migration which ends with their incorporation into Khama's community: 'As they turned their gaze toward those mysterious dreaming mountains and flat open plains, they did not know then that the spirit of Ulysses moved them as a people' (p. 9).

The reflections and observations of Sebina, the leader of the Sebina clan, reinforce narrative continuity, which Head establishes mainly by following the movements of the clan from one location to another. Sebina's life spans almost all of the nineteenth century. Head takes up the history of the clan in the year 1800, the year before Europeans first made contact with Tswana people,⁶ and completes her account of its fortunes in 1896, the year which marked the defeat of Cecil Rhodes' attempt to transfer the Bechuanaland Protectorate to the control of the

British South Africa Company. Sebina's people live, at one point, among the Bakalanga, a group which had been absorbed by the Shona. They survive the period of unrest generated by the encroachment of the Europeans further onto the interior of Southern Africa and the conflicts brought about by the displacement of many ethnic groups. Following the advent of the Ndebele in Mashonaland, Sebina and his people move on to live in Khama's capital, Shoshong, 'the wonderland of the Southern Hemisphere' (p. 61). Occupying his own ward in Khama's capital, Sebina becomes a witness both to 'the close of an era' (p. 140) and the birth of a new age.

Sebina witnesses many changes in the material life of the Bamangwato people. Ox-drawn ploughs replace the hoe and iron cooking pots supersede clay ones. The old order of sudden attacks and sudden migration seems to be giving way to an era of diplomacy. Sebina who accepts change as natural and inevitable appreciates the way in which the community is being transformed. He is especially drawn to the new 'book' learning. Terse written communication can replace lengthy deliberation, on occasion, and the opportunity to contemplate the written word gives the intellect greater play. Sebina's own memory is, by the end of the century, beginning to prove unreliable and he recognises the advantages of having written records to reinforce memory.

Having survived almost an entire century of changes, Sebina accepts the new influences as ones which allow what is best in the culture to flower and new 'truths' to emerge for scrutiny. He is thus able to look on at the death of the era which he represents, as calmly as he contemplates his own physical passing. He dies 'into the sunset' (p. 195) confident that his grandson Mazebe, who has acquired some of the new knowledge, will see the sunrise. Sebina's constant marvelling at the power of mind which Khama displays calls attention to the differences between a past overshadowed by 'dark' mysteries of religion and custom and an age in which attempts are being made to create a more even balance between the material and spiritual aspects of existence. Botswana is clearly being treated as a paradigm. Throughout the narrative, it is the power of Mind and the willingness to explore new ideas rather than an actual doctrine or teaching which Head emphasizes. Christianity as a new influence among the Bamangwato provides, Head suggests, a different light by which to examine custom: it is not necessarily something with which to replace custom.

Where Sebina functions as a witness to history, Khama III is a maker of history. His far-reaching social reforms affect even the position of women. Head shows him moved by compassion, but never the victim of sentimentality. While Khama acts on premises opposed to Lobengula's, he is equally uncompromising about maintaining control over his

territory, dispensing his own justice and asserting his sovereignty. He does not reject power, but he seeks to exercise it effectively.

In Khama III and Lobengula, Head is obviously comparing two concepts of leadership, as he did in *Maru* and *A Question of Power*, in the opposition of Maru and Moleka and Sello and Dan, respectively. Ironically, Khama's way of conducting affairs is mocked at by the British interests, whose encroachment on his territory he attempts to check, even as they declare their contempt for Lobengula and his aggressive policies. For both African leaders, neither arms nor diplomacy prove fully effective against the greed, cunning and treachery of the British, on the one hand, and the greed, self-assertiveness and fury of the Boers, on the other. Lobengula's kingdom is eventually dismembered. Khama's territory is saved from the land-grabbing gang instigated by Cecil Rhodes, only by chance, and is considered fortunate to be made a protectorate under the British Crown.

In *A Bewitched Crossroad*, Head's intentions are, clearly, mixed. The work leans toward the documentary rather than the fictional, but the well-researched and detailed record of events which Head presents is clearly meant to further elucidate themes which she introduced in her earlier works. The development of the Bamangwato under Khama III, which is highlighted in her rehearsal of events, in *A Bewitched Crossroad*, fits into a larger design and is important, for Head, in that it represents a period of enlightenment - a period when a society was open to new ideas and was becoming aware of its identity as a nation. The very name of the people whom she writes about suits her theme, for the word *mongwato*, as she indicates in the narrative (p. 65), means 'nation'. The accidental details of the history of Southern Africa in the nineteenth century are presented in such a way as to lead the reader to reflect on the process of social evolution within a nation, and as it affects relationships between members of different national and racial backgrounds. This concern with the process of social evolution is central to all of Head's works.

A Bewitched Crossroad may thus be seen as the final in a series of explorations of Head's major concerns. Moving beyond the problems of the displaced individual in a hostile environment, Head goes on to contemplate the struggle between opposed principles, using whole societies, rather than single individuals, as her chief protagonists. The preoccupation here is the same as in the novels - the problem of achieving a balance between intellect and passion and between material and spiritual well-being. *A Bewitched Crossroad* may also be seen as the final in a series of experiments with mixing literary genres. *A Question of Power* and *Maru* are two successful experiments with literary form.⁷ *A Bewitched Crossroad* is best appreciated as an attempt to combine elements

from different genres and different literary traditions and to reflect in a text the nature of the synthesis taking place in the writer's mind.

NOTES

1. Serowe (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. xv.
2. The phrase is taken from Bessie Head, *A Question of Power* (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 40.
3. See, for example, Donald Burness, *Shaka: King of the Zulus in African Literature* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1976).
4. See, for example, *When Rain Clouds Gather* (London: Heinemann, 1972), pp. 20 and 30.
5. *A Bewitched Crossroad* (Craighill: A.D. Donker, 1984), p. 132. Subsequent references to this book are given in the text. Compare, for example, Serowe, p. 7, and Maru (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 68.
6. See I. Schapera, *The Tswana* (London: International African Institute, 1976), p. 15.
7. See, for example, J. Johnson, 'Metaphor, Myth and Meaning in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*', *World Literature Written in English*, XXV, 2 (1985), 198-211, and 'Bessie Head and African Oral Tradition: The Structure of *Maru*', *Wasafiri*, No. 3 (Autumn, 1985), 5-8.

Book Reviews

Jeanne Delbaere, ed., *Multiple Voices: Recent Canadian Fiction* (Proceedings of the IVth International Symposium of the Brussels Centre for Canadian Studies). Sydney, Mundelstrup and Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1990. 264 pp. £14.95.

This volume is aptly entitled *Multiple Voices*. It is not a grabbag, but a well-planned multiple perspective montage on recent Canadian fiction. Indeed its multiplicity is what makes the book come alive (unlike so many other similar collections) and even gain cohesion as a state-of-the-art account of what is both in creative and critical terms a lively field in world literature. The amazing outburst of the 1970s when writers like Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro and Robert Kroetsch made the world aware of Canadian literature has not abided, but consolidated with the arrival of Aritha van Herk and Jack Hodgins, the emergence of Michael Ondaatje as a fiction writer, the steadily growing reputation of Rudy Wiebe, the rediscovery of Mavis Gallant as a Canadian, etc.

Multiple Voices reflects and attests the consolidation and widening scope of critical interest in Canadian fiction. Gone were the days of the Atwood monopoly. She gets the barest of mention in this volume (except in an article on the Quebecois reception of her critical work). Otherwise the book moves from a transcript of a writers' panel discussion (where important questions are raised) through academic papers grouped under headings like 'Ethnic Voices', 'Women's Voices', 'French/English Voices' and 'Multivoiced Fiction', headings which may be questionable but which manage to crystallize divergences and developments. There is a fruitful ambivalence round the terms 'ethnic' and 'multicultural', for instance, which allow for discussion in a way that the term 'women' sadly does not. Let alone the ever-present Theory/anti-Theory stand-off, which makes the French/English division look like a love duet. Both are language-based, of course: the former in a basic misunderstanding of the difference between *langue* and *parole* – on both sides, I suspect, though I won't put my hand further into that hornet's nest.

And yet: *langue* and *parole*, voice and writing are the connecting themes of the volume, including its 'frame' in imaginative writing of a high order by Robert Kroetsch and Jack Hodgins. In Kroetsch's 'I Wanted to Write a Manifesto' a childhood memoir of learning to write (many times) turns into a meditation on the nature of language and its relation to the world and of the relationship between writing and voice. In the extract from Hodgins' *Innocent Cities* a colonial Englishwoman goes nearly mad when transplanted from her European world of *things* into an Australian world of exotic *names*, of cockatoos and flooded gums, jarrahs and karris, words which seem to strangle her with fronds and sounds of unreality.

Similar antitheses pervade the academic contributions from Pierre Spriet's, Simone Vauthier's and Geert Lernout's marshalling of the Russian Formalist and French Post-structuralist apparatus to deal with the narrative strategies of Wiebe and Ondaatje through Neil Besner's readings of 'the bodies of the text' in Munro to Danielle Schaub's treatment of polyphonic narration in Mavis Gallant and John Thieme's of

alternative identity in Kroetsch irritatingly entitled 'There is No Business Like Snow Business'. This title, unlike the paper itself, hints at the dangers of critics becoming fashionably playful and not carrying it off. But the contributors are all to be commended for speaking the actual works of fiction; even Smaro Kamboureli in her account of 'Resistance to Theory in the Feminine' incorporates Lemire Tostevin's 'poem' 'sophie, though to my arch-reactionary senses the sprung rhythms of Kamboureli's own prose sound far more poetic than Tostevin's account of the sexism of Derrida.

The editor Jeanne Delbaere is to be commended for her sense of unforced, and hence 'beautiful symmetry' in the organizing of this mosaic of a book. And Dangaroo Press has added another fine example of book production to its list; I only wish the works of fiction dealt with were available in the same quality paper, print and binding as the conference proceedings.

MARTIN LEER

Jean-Pierre Durix, *The Writer Written. The Artist and Creation in the New Literatures in English*. Greenwood Press, 1987. 192 pp., Bibliog. index. £21.95.

What has the fiction of Margaret Lawrence and that of Witi Ihimaera in common? There is now a growing body of criticism devoted to finding a common literary aesthetic for the new literatures in English. James Weiland's *The Ensphering Mind* (1988), for example, has explored its new myths of dispossession, while Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), have examined the post-colonial modes of discourse. Professor Durix in *The Writer Written* brings together a Post-structuralist concern with cultural discourse, with an examination of the process of literary creation itself.

He places a study of four representative novels in the context of the roles of the artist in different post-colonial literatures. These can be diverse, ranging from teacher to *griot* and mythologiser. Amid the divergence of historical and cultural predicaments, Professor Durix nevertheless finds common concerns. What is the appropriate language and literary genre? Is the experience of radical cultural fragmentation destructive or liberating? Can the qualities of 'authenticity' replace the loss of 'roots'? These and other issues, Durix notes, give a vital sense of engagement to those on the new frontiers - 'in the major works produced by writers in different Commonwealth countries, there are few genuinely escapist books.' (p. 40).

The chapters of Part I, taken together with the selective Bibliography, make an excellent introduction to post-colonial literatures in English. This is especially so for readers with knowledge of one or two areas, who want a coherently argued view of the field as a whole. Professor Durix is strongest on the South Pacific and the Caribbean, but all the main areas are represented, with contextualising references to related fields, such as the 'magical realism' of Garcia Marquez. Such complex debates as those between Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott in the Caribbean, or the cultural positions of Albert Wendt and Witi Ihimaera in the Pacific, are expressed with accuracy and concision.

The broad survey of the first part is followed by the examination of specific texts in the second. Following Hayden White's exploration of 'meta-history,' Durix identifies works of 'meta-fiction', novels which are concerned with the nature of their own creative discourse. The works chosen are Patrick White's *The Vivisector*, Wilson Harris's *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, C.K. Stead's *All Visitors Ashore* and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Their main characters – White's Hurtle and Duffield; Harris's anonymous diarist; Stead's Melior Farbro and the Takapuna group of artists; and Saleem, the teasing narrator of Rushdie's novel, – are all in some ways concerned with the role of the artist, enmeshed in post-colonial contexts.

Their differences interestingly unite them: Durix indicates their common roots in a radical and often agonising realignment of experience and form. As Durix says, 'because they have experienced in their flesh the pain of having artificial selves imposed by others ... they endlessly repeat the necessity to unmask false selves and stereotyped attitudes'.

To examine such a huge field in a comparatively brief compass inevitably forced hard decisions. The differences of context and social reality are noted but not developed. There is also little space for evaluation of literary quality. Is *Midnight's Children* too long and complex for its literary good? Does Harris's difficult literary method limit his effectiveness as a socially concerned artist? Discussion of such questions must take place outside this study. Nevertheless, although compression makes selection necessary, there is remarkably little over-simplification, an achievement that will be best appreciated by those who have attempted a similar conspectus.

The work engages deliberately with the intellectual end of the spectrum of new literatures in English. It is Professor Durix's achievement to infuse his study with human interest. The title, 'the Writer Written', might suggest an abstract Post-structuralist account of the 'disappearance of the author', but the individual artist and his act of creation are at the centre of the book's concern. Professor Durix's balance of objectivity and passion makes it a most stimulating volume.

LOUIS JAMES

Reviews of *The Empire Writes Back*, *The Enspiring Mind*, *After Europe* and *A Shaping of Connections* will appear in issue no. 1, 1992.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FRANK BIRBALSINGH teaches at York University, Toronto, Canada.

JULIAN CROFT was born in Newcastle in 1941, and educated there. He worked as a Production Assistant in Film Australia, then in various Departments of English in universities in Australia and West Africa. He has lived in Armidale, NSW, for the past twenty years. He has published two collections of poems (the latest, *Confessions of a Corinthian*, Angus and Robertson, 1991), a novel, and several books of literary criticism, most recently a study of Joseph Furphy (1991). He has also had a three-act music drama performed in 1986. He is currently writing a history of Australian poetry in the twentieth century.

DAVID DABYDEEN was born in Guyana in 1956. He was educated at Cambridge University and University College, London. He has published two collections of poetry: *Slave Song*, which was awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, and *Coolie Odyssey*, both published by Dangaroo Press. He has also published several works of criticism, including *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art* which won the GLC Award for Literature.

ZENY GILES is a first-generation Australian, born in Sydney of Greek parents. In 1981 she won the Age Story Competition and had her first novel published: *Between Two Worlds*. In 1988, *Miracle of the Waters*, a group of stories set at the Moree Bore Baths, was published by Penguin. Zeny Giles has lived in Newcastle for the past thirty years.

MARION HALLIGAN was born in Newcastle, N.S.W., and educated there, but has lived most of her adult life in Canberra. Her stories have been published both in Australia and overseas and have won several awards, including the Steele Rudd Award, and the Braille Book of the Year Award in 1989 for *The Living Hothouse*. Her novel *Spider Cup* was published by Penguin in 1990.

WILSON HARRIS is a distinguished novelist and critic, one of the most influential forces in the development of the modern novel and post-colonial criticism. His most recent novel, *The Four Banks of the River of Space* (Faber & Faber) was published in 1990, and Dangaroo Press has just published a book of criticism on his work, *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination* (1991) edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek, to cel-

eborate his 70th birthday. The Government of Guyana has just awarded him The Cacique's Crown of Honour.

P.A. JEFFERY – librarian, wife, mother and grandmother – was born in Newcastle, and started writing short stories seven years ago. In that time she has won the Hunter F.A.W. Bi-centenary Short Story Award, 1988, and the Denis Butler Memorial Award, 1990.

JOYCE JOHNSON up until recently taught at the College of the Bahamas. She now lives in America.

CHARLES JORDAN was born in Brisbane and came to Newcastle in 1975. He went to Jesmond High School and is currently a Fine Art student at the University of Newcastle. He has been writing and performing poetry for two years.

PAUL KAVANAGH recently published a collection of interviews with Australian authors called *Conversations* (Harper Collins Angus & Robertson). During 1989 he worked at universities in Shanghai and Hefei, China.

MARTIN LEER is a graduate of Copenhagen University and the University of Queensland. He is at present doing post-doctoral research at Copenhagen University.

RUSSELL McDOUGALL was born and grew up in Newcastle. He holds degrees from Newcastle and Adelaide universities and Queen's University, Canada. At present he teaches at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia, where he is Deputy Director of the Centre for Australian Language and Literature Studies. Before making his way into academia, he worked as a professional musician. He supported the Hollies in 1973 on their national tour of Australia, was commissioned to compose the official song for Newcastle Mattara Festival, and enjoyed chart success around Australia with the commercial release of another of his compositions. Currently he is singing with a rhythm-and-blues/soul band called Maxwell Street.

ROSEMARY MELVILLE is majoring in History and English at The University of Newcastle in preparation for a career in heritage studies.

EVELYN O'CALLAGHAN teaches in the English Department of the University of the West Indies, Barbados.

CHRISTOPHER POLLNITZ teaches at the University of Newcastle and has a research interest in the poetry of D.H. Lawrence. He is married, has two children and lives at Merewether where he hopes to run a place, after Harri Jones and Julian Croft, in the Merewether Poetry Stakes.

RAE S. RICHARDS was born and educated in Melbourne. She has lived in Newcastle since 1959 and has had her paintings exhibited both in Australia and overseas. In 1966 she became interested in working with textiles, invented unique techniques of appliqué/collage wall hangings which she called Banners. These proved very successful culminating in a showing in London for Qantas and later in many solo exhibitions and commissions. The colour illustrations in this issue are from 'The Newcastle Quilt'. This is a traditional quilt with twelve appliquéd panels showing landmarks and typical scenes in Newcastle. It won the inaugural 'MATTARA' Art Award, an invitation competition across Australia, including all media, so the win was a breakthrough for fabric work.

ANNA RUTHERFORD was born in Mayfield, Newcastle, and was educated there by the Dominican nuns. She is a graduate of Newcastle University and since 1966 has taught at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, where she is in charge of post-colonial studies. She was the first woman to be elected International Chairperson of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies; is founding editor of *Kunapipi* and founding editor of Dangaroo Press which specializes in the literature, art and culture of the post-colonial world. On a lighter vein with Rob Sellick, she won the Frank Moorhouse Perpetual Trophe for Ballroom Dancing. She was also a member of Mayfield Catholics Basketball team which won the Newcastle A Grade Basketball Competition, and Mayfield Squash Club which won the Newcastle A Grade Squash Competition – but that was a long time ago!

IAN SAW lives in Sydney and has had a variety of occupations. He has recently begun to publish his poetry and during 1990 has had his poetry published in both Australia and the U.S.A.

E. SPEERS is an Australian poet who lives in Tasmania.

KATE WALKER has written many picture books, short stories and scripts for children. Her first novel, *The Dragon of Mith*, was an honour book in the 1990 Children's Book Council of Australia Awards.

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FICTION

David Dabydeen, Zeny Giles, Marion Halligan, P.A. Jeffery, Kate Walker.

POETRY

Julian Croft, Charles Jordan, Paul Kavanagh, Christopher Pollnitz, Ian Saw, E. Speers.

MUSIC

Russell McDougall.

ARTICLES

Rosemary Melville on 'The Newcastle That Henry Lawson Knew'; Martin Leer, 'From Linear to Areal: Suggestions Towards a Comparative Literary Geography of Canada and Australia'; Wilson Harris, 'The Life of Myth and its Possible Bearing on Erna Brodber's Fictions *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* and *Myal*'; Evelyn O'Callaghan, 'Engineering the Female Subject: Erna Brodber's *Myal*'; Joyce Johnson, 'A Novelist at the Crossroad: Bessie Head's *A Bewitched Crossroad*'.

INTERVIEW

David Dabydeen

BOOK REVIEWS

COVER

Nobbys Lighthouse and Beach, Newcastle, Australia.
Artist: Rae S. Richards.